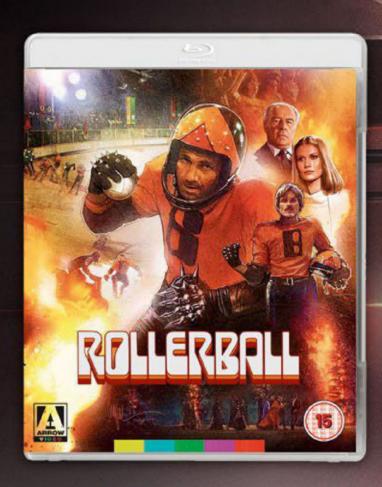




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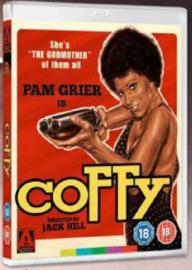


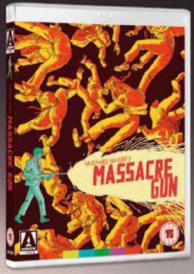
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STARBURST



APRIL 2015

EDITORIAL

Editor

JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Editor

MARTIN UNSWORTH
martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com

Honorary Editor-in-Chief

Online Editor

ANDREW POLLARD andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com

Webmaster

JIM BOON jim@starburstmagazine.com

Original Fiction Editor

RYLAN CAVELL rylan,cavell@starburstmagazine.com

Sequential Art Editor

ED FORTUNE ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com

ΔRT

Collectors' Edition Cover Artist

MARK REIHILL

Art Director

JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Art Director

SHAUNA ASKEW shauna.askew@starburstmagazine.com

PRESS

Press Liaison

PHIL PERRY
phil.perry@starburstmagazine.com

Event Correspondent

ANDREW KEATES andrew.keates@cabbell.co.uk

PLEASE SEND ALL PRESS RELEASES TO: press@starburstmagazine.com

THE GREATEST WRITING TEAM IN THE UNIVERSE

Head Writer

PAUL MOUNT

paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com

Lead Writers

VANESSA BERBEN, LIVVY BOOTE, JACK BOTTOMLEY, DOMINIC CUTHBERT,
KATE FATHERS, ED FORTUNE, JOEL HARLEY, CHRIS JACKSON,
CHRISTIAN JONES, TONY JONES, GRANT KEMPSTER, JOHN KNOTT,
ANDREW MARSHALL, IAIN MCNALLY, KIERON MOORE, STUART MULRAIN,
ROBIN PIERCE, ANDREW POLLARD, LEE PRICE, IAIN ROBERTSON,
CALLUM SHEPHARD, JR SOUTHALL, NICK SPACEK, ADAM STARKEY,
PETE TURNER, MARTIN UNSWORTH

Contributors

TOM ACTON, JONATHAN ANDERSON, SOPHIE ATHERTON, JENNIE BAILEY, PHIL BERESPORD, SIMON BESSON, NICK BLACKSHAW, FORD MADDOX BROWN, LARA BROWN, P.M. BUCHAN, NEIL BUCHANAN, ABIGAL CHANDLER, MARTYN CONTERIO, TONY COWIN, ALISTER DAVISON, SPLEENY DOTSON, CARA FIELDER, ZACHARY FOX, JD GILLAM, ANDY HALL, ANIMAL JOHNS, CHAMPION JOHNSON, ROBERT KEELING, ROD MCCANCE, NEIL MCNALLY, FRED MCNAMARA, HAYDEN MEARS, CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, ANDREW MUSK, JACKSON NASH, MICHAEL NOBLE, PADDY O'HARE, DR KAREN OUGHTON, WARRICK HORSLEY, CLEAVER PATTERSON, RYAN POLLARD, LUKE RILEY, PAUL RISKER, LAURA ROBINSON, WHITNEY SCOTTBAIN, DANIEL SEDDON, KAL SHANHAN, ROB TALBOT, JON TOWLSON, JOHN TOWNSEND, LEONA TURFORD, RICHARD THOMAS, SCOTT VARNHAM, NIGEL WATSON, SAMANTHA WARD, DAVID WHALLEY, IAN WHITET, THOMAS WINDWARD, ZACK THE ZOMBABY

ADVERTISING

Advertising Director

ANDREW KEATES
020 3603 4950
andrew.keates@cabbell.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Make sure you dont miss an issue of STARBURST by taking advantage of our great subscription offers at www.starburstmagazine.com.

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REVIEW MATERIALS

Please send all review materials to: STARBURST MAGAZINE PO BOX 4508 MANCHESTER M61 OGY

LIZARD

STARBURST HO is grateful for the protection of our faithful lizard TETSUO. A rebel survivor from the icke Reptilian Wars of the '80s, TETSUO remains vigilant to this day, upholding his promise to protect all of mankind from the ever present threat of reptilian evil.

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STARBURST PUBLISHING 2nd Floor, 60 Portland Street, Manchester M1 4QT 0161 228 2332

EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 411!

I was expecting to be talking about **Avengers: Age Of Ultron**, but sadly Leonard Nimoy passed away just as we were putting this issue together. Our very own **Girl From Planet X**, Livvy Boote has written a thoughtful tribute to Leonard on page 8. It's a fitting send off for a man that

has been at the heart of this magazine since it's very inception.

For anyone who has a copy of **STARBURST** Issue 1 (from way back in November 1977), they will have noticed a tiny picture of Spock on the cover. It looks oddly out of place on a magazine sporting a wraparound **Star Wars** cover. For legal reasons Dez Skinn had to put another property on the cover and so a last minute Spock was added. It would be the first of many covers to feature our favourite Vulcan. He even hogged the cover of the anniversary Issue 200!

Leonard Nimoy was a sci-fi icon the likes of which we may never see again in our lifetimes. The image of his character Spock was as recognisable the world over as the Coca-Cola logo. One of my earliest memories as a child was watching Spock on TV (Star Trek was just the show he was in!). He was the first rock star of sci-fi, and stayed with the genre despite his initial fears of type casting. He was a professional who would not allow the character of Spock to be frivolously featured in Star Trek without a decent story, famously turning down a well-paying cameo in Star Trek: Generations as the character was merely incidental. That might sound abit precious, but Leonard Nimoy always wanted to do a good job, and not undermine a character that the fans adored. It clearly mattered to him.

It was this professionalism that he applied to everything he became involved with, and besides Spock he did keep busy. Including a role in the incredible 1978 remake of **Invasion Of The Body Snatchers**. Now widely regarded as a classic, and featuring a disturbing performance from Leonard Nimoy, epitomising the paranoid undertones in play. Leonard Nimoy, his persona, and *that* voice are synonymous with our chosen hobby. For many of us he was the gateway drug to a lifelong pastime.

I am quite intolerant of people getting overly upset over the passing of someone they never met. I never had the pleasure of meeting Leonard Nimoy in person, and yet I felt genuinely sad when the news broke. It really was the end of an era. Thankfully he left behind a staggering body of work that will ensure that he is never forgotten.



Under the circumstances I won't be crass and tell you how great the mag is. It's an Avengers: Age Of Ultron issue, and we hope you like it. We always do our best to make each issue something special.

Until next issue, Keep watching the weird and wonderful,

> Jordan Royce EDITOR



THIS MONTH'S EXCLUSIVE WRAP-AROUND COLLECTORS' COVER BY MARK REIHILL

FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail: STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO Box 4508, Manchester, M61 0GY or email: letters@starburstmagazine.com

STAR

BACK IN THE FOLD

I used to subscribe to STARBURST MAGAZINE. we're talking 1979, I had my fix every month for decades then some years ago it all stopped, betrayed, used, okay she wasn't as young as she once was but off she went no explanation just gone. I had a brief fling with SCI-FI NOW but the age gap was to much and she was obsessed with superheroes well it just didn't work, but now STARBURST has waltzed back new

younger, teasing, flaunting, do I let her back in or stay magazine free? Oh damn it, of course I will welcome back you middle aged, buxom, tease I still adore you.

D.R.Green, via EMAIL

Well we are holding out our warm and loving arms/tractor beams for your return to the mothership. A cat will always come home when it's hungry, and you obviously weren't getting a full belly elsewhere. Welcome back!

LETTER

GLOSSING OFF

Congratulations STARBURST on your GAME OF THRONES issue - the looks ahead at what's to come and recap of the story so far have got me filling my flagons of wine in excited preparation for season five! Though I think it's the cover I loved most these new glossy covers are so shiny and I can't stop stroking it.

Junius, via EMAIL

Yes! Nice and glossy for if you spill your flagons of wine on it, if you read some GAME OF off the cover! Or if you see

WEB OF CONFUSION

Spider-Man business. There's going to be another reboot? Does this mean the Sinister Six movie's not happening? When's he going to be in the Avengers? Help me STARBURST, you're my only hope (wrong franchise, I know). I saw another genre site use

THRONES spoilers and end up crying, your tears can bounce something you like and...

I'm confused by this whole

just wipe clean! Same applies the term 'threeboot' and nearly CONTEST

"Spidey, remove your hand from Sue Storm's breast and help me open this window!"

Winner: Chris Saunders. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

chucked up my lunch, so I'm hoping you can provide all the explanations without any such horrible language.

Max, via EMAIL

So are we! Threeboots? Here were we thinking he would have eightboots.

FINAL CUT

I was really enjoying the CONAN feature in your last issue. Until I got to the end, that is, and the last line seemed to be missing. What kind of barbarian torture Is this - now I might never know the ending!

Peter Eskdale, via EMAIL

That's Conan with his pesky sword, he's so slice-happy, he cut the end of the sentance off, tsk! Here you go; "...we may well have to wait a whole Hyborian Age before we see Conan on the silver screen again". Those are the missing words, what a saga to get to the

GHOUL POWER

What's your opinion on the all-female GHOSTBUSTERS reboot? I think it's a great idea -more great female-led films is no bad thing, and to be honest, Bill Murray's probably past his years of operating a proton pack. Though the 'don't cross the streams' gags may not have the same appeal this time around...

G Ebdon, Yorkshire

We're on your side with that! Not the other side... oOoOoOoh (ghost sound)! Our GIRL FROM PLANET X covers this topic in more detail this month on page 56.

IT'S A MYSTERY...

Just a few recent TV show observations I wanted to put out there. Why are there no toilet facilities for the metahuman prisoners in THE FLASH? And why is the grass so well tended in house gardens in THE WALKING DEAD? (not seeing herds of sheep or cows roaming around). Don't want to be picky about everything, but everybody poos. Maybe the readers can help?

Emma, via EMAIL

These are very good points you raise! Along the same lines, this makes us think that on THE WALKING DEAD, if Zombies Walkers are chowing down on

every piece of hot flesh they can get their teeth/gums into 24/7, then where does it all go?! In England if ever walking around fields it seems you can't go a few meters without tripping over a cow pat... so yeah ZOMBIE PATS! Where is all this Metahuman and Zompoo going!

So if any readers have any theories regarding who's cutting the grass on THE WALKING DEAD, or the poo mysteries do get in touch!

HORSES FOR COURSES

Wow. STARBURST you're really opened my eyes with the "SEXY INFLATIBLE GIRL PONY DOLL" (pictured in 410 letters page), and I don't mean I'm going to buy one! I was surprised such a thing exists! It's worrying what some people get up to, but it also gave me a laugh.

Steve via EMAIL

It's amazing what goes on behind closed (stable) doors.

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@Black_Jack_B

Do robocats dream of electric tuna? Another kitten friendly issue of @STARBURST_MAG



ON CANADIANS 'SPOCKING' FIVERS AS A NIMOY TRIBUTE:

@tariglatif42

I particularly like the Mirror Universe



LEONARD NIMOY by Livvy Boote

"The miracle is this: the more we share the more we have."

-Leonard Nimoy, 1931-2015 A Lifetime of Love: Poems on the Passages of Life.

In the time that Leonard Nimoy spent with us, he shared an awful lot.

Leonard decided to become an actor, despite his father's scepticism, because he wanted to make a difference to society. "When I chose to be an actor, it was not because I wanted to be famous, it was because I wanted to make a contribution."

And weren't his contributions magnificent?

For most of us, his most memorable role was as Mr Spock in Star Trek: The Original Series.

Leonard struggled with the role at first. Having been trained to use acting as a form of emotional expression, Spock brought challenges that few actors confront. How do you portray and develop a character who doesn't emote? How can you make an audience connect to a man who is so shut off from emotion?

For Star Trek fans, who can become so immersed within its universe, it's hard to imagine the scepticism and anxiety Leonard would feel at the premise of such a character as Spock. Leonard took on the role, thankful for some steady work after 15 years of playing minor parts - but the prospect of dodgy pointy ears and plucked eyebrows naturally made him concerned that it would turn his career into what he called a "bad joke". The role frightened him. But, in his own words, in an interview with Pharrell Williams: "If it scares you, it's coming from a place that might have a creative button". So he took the chance; and if he hadn't, today's sci-fi world would look very different.

would look very different.

Despite his initial mixed feelings,
Leonard's perseverance and eventual
affection towards the character has helped
to make Spock one of the most significant
fictional characters of the past 50 years.

His portrayal of the stoic yet loveable half-Vulcan half-Human brought a dimension to the show that was, to use Spock's favourite expression, "...fascinating". Leonard's involvement with the character pushed him to approach Gene Roddenberry with concepts which became essential to Spock's character; the idea of a culture



which communicates with their hands, producing the legendary Vulcan salute, inspired by his Jewish upbringing and the images of Hebrew prayers he witnessed as a child in the synagogue. His dedication to Spock's development created the iconic eyebrow raises, the looks of quiet judgement, and alongside the oh-so-very different William Shatner and DeForest Kelley, it all brought a sort of magic to the show - without which Star Trek would surely have never received the praise it has earned today, or inspired as many people. He was, as Roddenberry said, "The conscience of Star Trek."

But of course, Leonard's contributions did not end here. His influence could be said to have started at boyhood; at 13, he discovered the marvels of photography and developed film in his family bathroom. The magic of developing photos as a child

in his own home inspired Leonard to learn photography as an art later in his life. This began with his fascination with an Ancient Greek fable; one of human beings who were born in pairs, then torn apart and separated through the jealousy of the Gods, spending the rest of their lives trying to fulfil the inexplicable feeling of loss they had been left with.

With this in mind, Leonard strove to capture the human condition through photography, to immortalise the depth of humanity's beauty, strength, emotions and diversity. His 'Secret Selves' project shows the layers of a person's character that they hide behind their surface; the 'Shekhina' photo-shoot creates a subversive combination between religion and sexuality; his 'Full Body Project' challenges society's perception of body image. Leonard's role in *Star Trek*, then, was not the only thing





to draw him towards the controversial and ground-breaking.

In his interview with Pharrell Williams in 2014, he shared his opinion on the artistic life. "I came across, eventually, a piece of writing that expresses the artistic condition, I think, brilliantly. It says Edward Booth, the actor, heard the solemn whisper of the god of all arts. He said: 'I shall give you hunger, and pain, and sleepless nights; also beauty, and satisfaction known to few, and glimpses of the heavenly life. None of these shall you have continually, and of their coming and going, you shall not be foretold.' And that to me sums up the life of a creative person."

After spending years waiting for his big break, and desperately hoping that Spock would be it, even with his funny prosthetic ears and purple eye shadow - it's not hard to imagine the pain and sleepless nights taking up much of his artistic career. But in turn the role also brought something beautiful - a gateway into photography, directing, a (bizarrely wonderful!) music career, an opportunity to make lifelong friends. And a character who would stay in the hearts and memories of generations of people.

For sci-fi fans, Spock is not just one of the most prominent characters within the sci-fi world; he was also a role model, a character almost more relatable, somehow more human than anyone else on the show. Leonard helped make Spock someone who struggled with accepting who he was, a man of two worlds who faced prejudice wherever he went.

And so when, in 1968, a young mixedrace girl wrote to the magazine Fave, asking Mr Spock how she could be happy in a society where she didn't feel she belonged, Leonard responded with a heart-felt response that resonates today.

"Spock learned he could save himself from letting prejudice get him down. He could do this by really understanding himself



and knowing his own value as a person. He found he was equal to anyone who might try to put him down - equal in his own way."

He continues to say, "Spock decided he would live up to his personal value and uniqueness. He'd do whatever made him feel best about himself. He decided to listen to the little voice inside him and not to the people around him." Leonard has helped make Spock more important, more inspirational than almost any other fictional character for so many people.

In the 83 years that Leonard Nimoy lived, he contributed in many ways; he directed Star Trek IV; he produced evocative, thought-provoking art and poetry; he fought for equality, and the equal pay of his female co-worker and friend Nichelle Nichols while filming Star Trek. He overcame alcoholism and quit smoking, and helped others through the same difficulties; and he created a

character who influenced millions of people to be yourself, to be brave, to boldly go where no one has gone before.

It might seem fitting to round this off with the immortal phrase 'Live Long and Prosper' - after all, it's one he used so often to sign out with his fans. But after everything Leonard has done to inspire so many of us, the following few lines of his own poetry seem to me to be a perfect reflection of our love and appreciation for his life. Goodbye, and thank you, Mister Spock.

"Celebrate the dreams and hopes Which have filled the souls of All decent men and women.

We shall lift our glasses and toast With tears of joy."

-Leonard Nimoy, 1931-2015 A Lifetime of Love: Poems on the Passages of Life.



THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE BEST (AND WORST) OF THIS MONTH'S MOVIE / TV NEWS

THINGS TO COME



MARVEL

Now the Marvel segment of TTC tends to often get a little out of control and becomes as lengthy as Assistant Ed Martin's renowned girth, but this month there's not all that much to report. There has, however, been some news from 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, with **EastEnders**' Ben Hardy having bagged a mystery role in Bryan Singer's **X-Men: Apocalypse.** All that is being said about the role is that it is "significant". Given Hardy's appearance and how the titular Apocalypse is the villain of the piece, many are speculating that the actor will be playing Warren Worthington III, better known as Angel or, if in the guise of one of Apocalypse's Four Horsemen, Archangel. The film has also cast **Let Me In** and **Dawn of the Planet of the Apes**' Kodi Smit-McPhee as a younger take on Kurt Wagner, aka Nightcrawler, seen in **X2** as played by Alan Cumming. **X-Men: Apocalypse** is currently set for a May 27th, 2016 release.

Sticking with Fox's Marvel movies, the Ryan Reynolds-starring **Deadpool** is starting to gain some momentum and has added some new names to the film. **Gotham**'s Morena Baccarin has landed the female lead of the film, although just which character she'll be playing is being kept under wraps for now. Also joining the fray is MMA fighter Gina Carano, best known for turns in **Haywire** and **Furious 6**, as the little known member of the Morlocks known as Angel Dust. One name who won't be joining the action is Daniel Cudmore. Despite Colossus confirmed to play a part in **Deadpool**,

MARTYRS



We have our first look at the US remake of the gruelling French hit **Martyrs**, directed by The Goetz Brothers (**Wrecked**) and starring **True Blood**'s Bailey Noble and Troian Bellisario. Whether the (unnecessary) American version will keep Pascal Laugier's fascinatingly sickening tone remains to be seen.

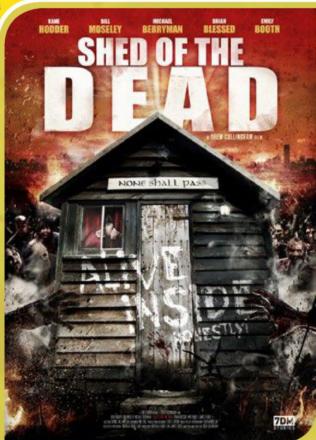
the actor who played the character in X2, X-Men: The Last Stand and X-Men: Days of Future Past has revealed that he will not be reprising the role for the Merc with a Mouth's solo film. To be directed by Tim Miller, Deadpool is to be released on February 12th, 2016. Additionally, director James Mangold has confirmed that his next Wolverine movie will begin production "early next year" ahead of its March 3rd, 2017 release.

As for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the only slight stories of note this month revolve around a certain Webhead. One current rumour is that the new Spider-Man may not be white and it may not even be Peter Parker under the famed mask when the Wallcrawler makes his MCU bow in Captain America: Civil War on May 6th, 2016. That's purely speculation at this stage, though. Additionally, Drew Goddard is believed to be in advanced talks to sign on to write and direct the first of the new Spider-Man solo movies, which is set for a July 28th, 2017 release. Goddard was previously attached to pen and helm the Sinister Six spin-off flick before the whole Amazing Spider-Man franchise got scrapped. There are rumblings that the Sinister Six team may be worked into the first solo Spidey film, and there's even suggestions that the film will see Spider-Man having to fight Iron Man as an initiation of sorts to joining The Avengers. It's currently believed that this new Wallcrawler movie will be the first of a new trilogy, said to be titled Spectacular Spider-Man. AP



To be filed in the 'Have we seen this before?' section, the latest poster for Brad Bird's **Tomorrowland** has a definite unoriginal feel. Headed by George Clooney, the film itself has an interesting premise promising shared destinies and collective memories. Co-written with Damon Lindelof, the film opens on May 22nd.





SHED OF THE DEAD

In terms of horror icons, the names Jason Voorhees, Otis B. Driftwood and Pluto are up there in the realms of royalty. Throw those names into the mix with the sultry and sumptuous Emily Booth and you have something that horror fans can really get their teeth into.

As it would happen, the aforementioned names have all signed on for a new project from director Drew Cullingham that will be right up the street of many a horror hound.

In some rather exciting news, producer Nick Lean revealed to us that the upcoming **Shed of the Dead** has secured the fantastic cast of genre faves Kane Hodder, Bill Moseley, Michael Berryman, and Emily Booth. And to add even further to its credentials, the film has also managed to sign up Brian Blessed (he of fantastic beard, booming voice and even better laugh) for an appearance.

A veritable who's who of horror, Shed of the Dead has certainly put quite the impressive cast together, we're sure you'll agree. Hodder is regarded as the definitive Jason Voorhees, having played the hockey mask-adorned killer in four Friday The 13th movies, and is also responsible for playing another horror favourite in the shape of the Hatchet series' Victor Crowley. With roles in the likes of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2, Night Of The Living Dead and 2001 Maniacs: Field Of Screams, Moseley is best known to most horror fans as the chilling and erratic Otis B. Driftwood in Rob Zombie's House Of 1,000 Corpses and The Devil's Rejects. Michael Berryman also appeared with Moseley in the latter, not to mention popping up in a plethora of projects over the years, although he will always be revered and remembered by most for his iconic turn as Pluto in Wes Craven's The Hills Have Eyes movies. Then there's Emily "Bouff" Booth, a staple of British horror who can be regularly seen on the UK's Horror Channel as well as seemingly anywhere and everywhere that there's something horror-based happening (see our interview on page 52). And of course, Brian Blessed is quite simply just Brian Blessed. No more really needs to be said about this British institution best known for booming his way through 1980's Flash Gordon movie.

Plot-wise, **Shed of the Dead** will focus on a group who wind up in the middle of an urban zombie apocalypse. With a sinister and adult edge to its humour, it's looking like the film will take cues from **Shaun of the Dead** but amp things up a little.

At this stage, **Shed of the Dead** is looking to start shooting around the middle of the year, but expect to hear more on this as it develops. AP

BARBIE

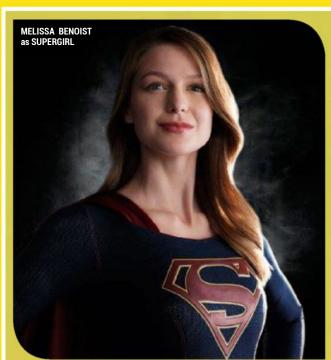
In a completely mind-boggling announcement, it seems Diablo Cody (Juno, Jennifer's Body) is working on a draft of Barbie for Sony Pictures. Speaking of Cody's involvement, producer Walter Parkes said: "Diablo's unconventionality is just what Barbie needs, it signals we're going for a legitimately contemporary tone. We're bringing her on because she had great ideas, but even more importantly, she truly loves Barbie." Quite whether Cody's sharp, quote-worthy dialogue will work with the squeaky-clean Valley Girl image of the ill-proportioned doll remains to be seen.

HANNIBAL SEASON 3

The eagerly-awaited Season 3 of NBC's **Hannibal** has now got a launch date of June 4th in the US, presumably a day or so after the UK. Joining the cast this year will be **Star Trek**'s Zachary Quinto, who will play a patient of Gillian Anderson's Dr Bedelia Du Maurier in at least one episode. It's already been announced that this season will feature characters from Thomas Harris' **Red Dragon** novel, which was filmed previously under that title and way back in 1986 as **Manhunter**, directed by Michael Mann.



The latest from Tarsem Singh (Immortals) features everyone's favourite slaphead, Ben Kingsley [You sure? – Ed] swapping his mind into the body of Ryan Reynolds in order to cheat death. We'll find out if there's more to the film than is shown in the rather spoiler-filled trailer when it opens on July 31st.



DC

The majority of live-action DC news this month has been focussed on the small screen, and the show making the most waves is CBS' upcoming Supergirl. Having already cast Melissa Benoist as Kara Danvers/Kara Zor-El/Supergirl and Mehcad Brooks as Jimmy Olsen, the series has been rather busy amassing further new additions. The two names that stand out the most are the familiar "Super" faces of Dean Cain and Helen Slater, who have joined the series in currently unknown roles. Cain, of course, starred as Superman in Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman, whilst Slater took on the role of the titular heroine in 1984's Supergirl movie. As well as these two additions, Grey's Anatomy's Chyler Leigh will be playing Kara's foster sister Alex Danvers, Homeland's David Harewood is Hank Henshaw (who in the comics becomes Cyborg Superman), Nashville's Laura Benanti will be Kara's Kryptonian birth mother Alura Zor-El, The Last Five Years' Jeremy Jordan is playing Winslow "Winn" Schott (who winds up as the villainous Toyman in comic book lore), and Ally McBeal star (and other half of that Han Solo fella) Calista Flockhart is Cat Grant, Kara's boss at CatCo. Additionally, CBS released a rather impressive looking first look at Benoist all suited and booted as Supergirl just as we were going to print. Then in some interesting news, the show has also put out a casting call for what seems to be a Superman body double. The actual ad reveals that the show is looking for a 'Body double for a DC Comic Superhero' and that applicants need to be 5'11" or taller, square jawed and with a ripped physique. Coincidentally, all e-mail applications are to use "Superman" as the subject matter. Supergirl is set to debut for the 2015/16 season of TV

Switching to familiar fan favourites Arrow and The Flash, they've also seen a few new faces added to their ranks. First up, The Walking Dead's Emily Kinney (RIP Beth) will be appearing in The Flash as Brie Larvan, a take on the DC villain Bug-Eyed Bandit. As for Arrow, the hugely talented Doug Jones, best known for the likes of the Hellboy movies, Pan's Labyrinth, Fantastic Four. Rise of the Silver Surfer and Falling Skies, is to butt heads with the Emerald Archer when he debuts later this season as Jake Simmons, aka Deathbolt. Whereas the comic book version of Deathbolt controls lightning and electricity, this adaptation of the villain will instead control plasma energy. His addition also marks the first time that Arrow will feature a meta-human villain.

Whereas they've both had new faces announced over the last few weeks, the biggest news for **Arrow** and **The Flash** is that they are to have a new show spun-off from them. No title has been given to the series as of yet, although it seems to be very much in the style of the classic **Brave and the Bold** tales as it will be based around team-ups. The names announced for it are Brandon Routh,

Victor Garber, Wentworth Miller and Caity Lotz. Routh is **Arrow**'s Ray Palmer/The Atom, Garber is one half of **The Flash**'s Firestorm, Miller is **The Flash**'s villainous Captain Cold, and Lotz is **Arrow**'s supposedly dead Sara Lance/Canary. Some stories claim that Lotz could possibly play a new character in the show (please not a long lost twin!), whilst the other notion is either Sara appears in flashbacks or simply she didn't really die during the opening episode of **Arrow**'s Season 3. Interestingly, this new series will also introduce three DC characters who have never been seen in live-action before. Of course, the three in question are being kept hush-hush at this stage.

FOX and DC Entertainment's upcoming Lucifer show has seen some movement this month, too, with **Rush**'s Tom Ellis having landed the lead role in the series. As well as this, **Underworld** director and Sleepy Hollow co-creator Len Wiseman will be overseeing the project and Jerry Bruckheimer will be executive producing. Lucifer has been given a pilot order, and the story will focus on the titular character as he becomes bored of ruling Hell and so gives up his crown and moves to Los Angeles, where he then assists the LAPD in punishing criminals. And sticking with FOX, Gotham has added Homeland's Chris Chalk as Lucius Fox. He'll debut in the penultimate episode of Season 1, with the option to bring the character back for the following season. One person who will not be back for Season 2 is Jada Pinkett-Smith's Fish Mooney, with the actress revealing that there's currently no plans to bring the character back for the next season. Cue speculation that Fish will be getting offed (by Penguin, anyone?) by the time Season 1 comes to a close.

On big screen DC happenings, **Suicide Squad** has added **Hostel**'s Jay Rodriguez in an unknown role which some are speculating will be a cell-mate of Jared Leto's Joker. If that is indeed the case, don't expect him to last too long. David Ayer's villain-centric film has also finally filled the Tom Hardy void and cast a new Rick Flag, with **RoboCop** reboot's Joel Kinnaman confirmed for that gig. **Suicide Squad** is currently set for an August 5th, 2016 release.

As for the final DC news, Michelle MacLaren's Gal Gadotstarring **Wonder Woman** has been confirmed to start production in the second half of this year ahead of its June 23rd, 2017 release, whilst this month also saw director Zack Snyder reveal the first glimpse of Jason Momoa as Aquaman ahead of the character debuting alongside Wonder Woman in March 25th, 2016's **Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice.** AP

AND FINALLY...

Apparently, FOX is developing a series based on Sylvester Stallone's bombastic **Expendables** franchise. Currently described as 'fun action drama', the plan is to bring in iconic TV stars 'as a new team of highly-skilled heroes who are on a mission to stop a dangerous terrorist.' We vote for **Magnum P.I.** and **The Fall Guy!**

Roland Emmerich has confirmed that Jeff Goldblum will be returning in **Independence Day 2**. Joining him will be **The Hunger Games**' Liam Hemsworth, in a role believed to be the son-in-law of Bill Pullman's President Whitmore (assuming he will return), and Jessie Usher as the son of Will Smith's Captain Hiller. The Fresh Prince is not going to be returning this time out. **ID4-2** is released June 24th 2016.

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After the trailer was well-received by everyone, Twentieth Century Fox have moved the US release date for the **Poltergeist** remake/reboot forward to May 22nd. For the time being, the UK date is still July 24th.

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Fast becoming known as the most accident-prone actor in sci-fi, Harrison Ford has been confirmed as appearing in **Blade Runner 2**. Ford, who was recently hurt after he crashed his plane, has signed on to the sequel, which will be directed by Denis Villeneuve (**Prisoners**) with original director Ridley Scott serving as a producer.

Rob Zombie's upcoming film 31 has added several fantastic names to its cast. David Ury (Breaking Bad) and the fabulous British cult actor Judy Geeson (The Lords of Salem, Goodbye Gemini) will be joining Elizabeth Daily, best known as voicing Tommy Pickles in Rugrats and Buttercup in The Powerpuff Girls, and the director's wife, Sheri Moon Zombie.

TTC 411 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth



NOSTRINGS ATTACKED







Easily the most anticipated film of 2015 (besides STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS, of course), AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON has generated a buzz that rarely accompanies a new release. Fueled by some mighty Marvel marketing and bolstered by the promise of more sure-handed direction by JOSS WHEDON, the sequel to 2012's runaway blockbuster, THE AVENGERS, promises even more action, thrills, and danger than its superpowered predecessor...



ot only will Age of Ultron introduce one of the most formidable villains in the Marvel Universe, it will usher in a turbulent new era for Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Alliances will splinter, heroes will fall, and Hulks will smash as the Marvel Cinematic Universe moves into darker, more thoughtful territory. With Captain America: Civil War looming on the horizon, one can bet that the heroes who once stopped Loki from obliterating New York will have to come to grips with an even tougher challenge: working past their breathtaking differences and functioning as a team.

As the film's release quickly approaches, our excitement mounts and our expectations remain as high as they ever were. To temporarily satisfy your Avengers cravings and prepare you for what Whedon, Marvel, and company have in store, we have whipped up a complete preview of this highly anticipated release in the hopes that the long wait for April comes just a bit easier for us all.

THE PLOT

It's been three years since Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, and the rest of the Avengers stopped Loki and his army of Chitauri from enslaving the human race. Upon reaching the conclusion that his team can't possibly address every threat that pops up on the screens at Avengers Tower, Tony Stark decides to put his brilliance to work in an effort to stop more bad guys without the Avengers having to step in every time. He whips up a program that















is specifically engineered as a bouncer for Planet Earth. Naturally, his creation, Ultron, swiftly, viciously, and violently turns on him, ominously informing him that he intends to kill each and every one of them.

Aiding Ultron on his rampage are the superpowered twins, Wanda and Pietro Maximoff (Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver, respectively).

Ultron adapts, learns, and grows, transforming into the monstrous maniac destined to become undoubtedly one of the most powerful adversaries Earth's Mightiest Heroes will ever face.

THE CHARACTERS

IRON MAN/TONY STARK

What's he up to: Since Loki threatened to level New York City with an army of hideous aliens, Tony Stark has taken it upon himself to rechristen Stark Tower as "Avengers Tower" and establish it as the official base of operations for the team. He realises that even the Avengers have finite resources, so he creates Ultron, a program designed to neutralise threats not worth his team's time. Obviously, his plan goes awry immediately and he finds himself responsible for a murderous robot bringing death and destruction to the human race. Stark co-leads the Avengers, along with Captain America.

CAPTAIN AMERICA/ STEVE ROGERS

What's he up to: Life hasn't been a cakewalk for Steve Rogers. After plunging himself (and a big ass Hydra ship) into an icy ocean and inadvertently preserving himself for S.H.I.E.L.D. agents to find later, he has become a leader in a struggle for the survival of the human race. Out of time and out of his league, Rogers does what he can with what he has while he quietly struggles to find his place in a world that has left him behind. Rogers co-leads the Avengers, and sports a super new, super-spangly outfit.

THOR

What's he up to: Son of respected King Odin and half-brother of reviled trickster Loki, Thor has much to look forward to and much to fear. After preventing a reality-warping dark elf from destroying Asgard, Thor has forfeited his kingship and returned to Earth to be with Jane Foster. As the hammer-wielding, lightning-summoning heavy hitter of the team, Thor is a force to be reckoned with and a match even for the Hulk. Ultron will undoubtedly use Thor's formidable strength against him and the rest of the Avengers.

BRUCE BANNER/THE HULK

What's he up to: Aside from a hilarious chat with Tony Stark, Bruce Banner has been notably absent from the recent happenings in the Marvel Universe. When













we last saw him, he had transformed into the Hulk and proceeded to wreck some Chitauri soldiers on the streets of New York City. This time around, though, we can expect to see him face off against... Iron Man?!? Of course, if you've seen the trailers, you already know this and probably want us to stop wasting valuable space with stuff you learned months ago. But the details surrounding the fight and what causes it remain shrouded in mystery. Regardless of what happens, you can bet that the Hulk and his more agreeable counterpart won't be the same by the time the credits roll.

CLINT BARTON/HAWKEYE

What's he up to: Clint Barton's current situation remains just as much a mystery as Banner's. Now that's he not firing arrows into alien soldiers and being a bona-fide bad-ass, what's he up to? Where's he been? Where's he going? Trailers for Age of Ultron have shown us quick shots of Hawkeye running through snow-draped woodlands, bow in hand, with a grim expression on his face. It's assumed that he'll enjoy a considerable amount of screen time, but his role in the film's events will likely remain a close-guarded secret until the film storms onto screens in April.

BLACK WIDDW/ NATASHA ROMANOFF

What she's up to: Speaking of bona-fide bad-asses, we'd be remiss if we didn't talk

about former S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent Natasha Romanoff. After helping Captain America take down Hydra leader Alexander Pierce and stop a plot to wipe out millions of people, Romanoff decided to disappear indefinitely. Obviously, she reappears to offer up her expertise when Ultron comes a-knockin', and we are so excited to have her back. Whedon and the head honchos over at Marvel have promised LOTS of Black Widow backstory this time around, so prepare to be enlightened.

NICK FURY

What's he up to: S.H.I.E.L.D.
has been compromised and
now operates in secret
with less manpower and
fewer resources. The
head of S.H.I.E.L.D., Nick Fury,
now sticks to the shadows and
keeps a low profile; primarily because the
world believes he died at the hands of the
Winter Soldier. His role in Age of Ultron
will undoubtedly be a smaller one, but his
presence will be felt as the Avengers battle
their mighty foe.

JAMES RHODES/ WAR MACHINE

What's he up to: Since the events of Iron Man 3, little has been said or heard of James Rhodes. He's been Tony Stark's dearest friend for years, but this is his first team-up with the Avengers. Glimpses



















of him can be seen in the trailers and footage Marvel has released so far, but the nature of his involvement has not yet been discussed or even really hinted at. That's ok, though. We're pretty sure he'll get some moments to shine.

MARIA HILL

What's she up to: The deeper we dive into Marvel lore, the more we realise just how important S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent-turned-Stark Industries employee Maria Hill is. She's always been Fury's second-in-command, but her role in what's to come will prove to be much bigger than those unfamiliar with the comics would be led to believe. Her role in Age of Ultron likely will lead directly into next year's Captain America: Civil War, with Tony Stark and Steve Rogers battling it out in an earth-shaking conflict with horrifying ramifications.

ULTRON

What's he up to: In the comics,
Ultron becomes one of the most
powerful villains to ever butt heads
with the Avengers. Cruel, sadistic,
and unbelievably intelligent, Ultron
establishes himself as a villain that
can't be taken down alone. Originally, he
was created by Hank Pym (Ant-Man),
but Whedon's version of the character
will be the brainchild of Tony Stark.
Originally intended to be a peacekeeping
robot, Ultron abandons his purpose and

vows to destroy the human race. Big mindset shift, right? Whedon tweaked and altered Ultron's abilities to make him more... beatable, but rest assured, he'll still give the Avengers a run for their money.

SCARLET WITCH AND QUICKSILVER

First glimpsed in the post-credits scene of Captain America: The Winter Soldier, Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch are two new adversaries the Avengers will have to face this time around. Gifted with super-speed and the frightening ability to alter reality, respectively, these powerful twins will stand by Ultron and do his dirty work while he builds an army and inches closer to world domination.

VISION

Vision is an android Ultron created to combat the Avengers. Unfortunately for our murderous robot, though, Vision turns on him and joins the team he was sent to kill. Don't let his absurd appearance fool you: he's an unbelievably powerful being and a huge asset to the Avengers. Oh yeah, and he eventually ends up hooking up with Scarlet Witch. He's pretty cool.

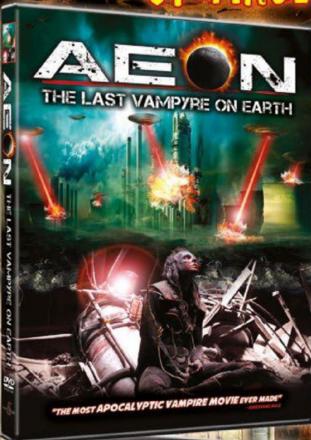
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON hits UK cinemas on April 23rd, with the US release the following week on May 1 st.

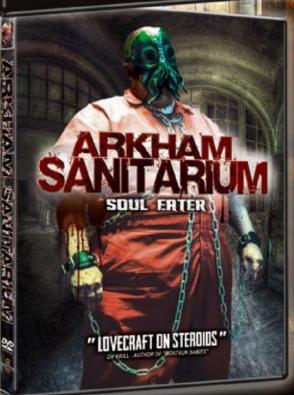




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Away from the titular villain, AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON's two main new additions to the MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE are the brother/sister combo of Pietro and Wanda Maximoff, better known as QUICKSILVER and the SCARLET WITCH, respectively. With quite the storied comic book history, let us get you a little better acquainted with "the twins"...

CINEMATIC SIBLINGS

In terms of the big screen MCU, you've already seen Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. Well, unless you're one of those silly fools who walk out of comic book movies before the credits have completely stopped rolling - although we're pretty sure those people are extinct these days. With Pietro played by Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Wanda by Elizabeth Olsen, the duo debuted in the post-credits sequence for the Russo Brothers' Captain America: The Winter Soldier. Referred to as "the twins", the pair are introduced by Thomas Kretschmann's Baron von Strucker and their powers are seemingly the results of experimentation rather than the comic book origins of them being mutants.

Ah, mutants – the dirty word in the MCU. You see, you would be right in thinking you've seen Quicksilver before, so

to speak. The character appeared in last year's X-Men: Days of Future Past, where Evan Peters played a younger version of the character. The first glimpses and design of that particular Pietro, or Peter as he was referred to, had us wincing and getting our pens (or should that be fingers these days) warmed up for some serious bashing, instead, despite Days of Future Past having its problems, Peters' Quicksilver was an absolute joy to behold, completely stealing the film and making us want to see more. Additionally, there were initial plans to feature a young Scarlet Witch in Days of Future Past (in fact, some believe that she actually did appear, seeing as Peter has a younger, red-haired sister) and there was also a blink-and-you'll-miss-it appearance from a young Pietro in the seemingly noncanon X-Men Origins: Wolverine.

But the Quicksilver you saw in Days

of Future Past is not the Quicksilver that you'll be seeing in Age of Ultron and there are absolutely no ties between these two versions of Marvel's speedster. You see, Marvel Studios/Disney and 20th Century Fox have an agreement between them where they can both use Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, as the siblings are key to both the X-Men world and the Avengers world. When Marvel sold the rights to the X-Men to Fox, that also included use of the term mutant. Make no mistake about it, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch are mutants in the comic book world, just the MCU cannot refer to them as such. From what we've seen so far, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is referring to them as "miracles" in an attempt to swerve the M word. Just how exactly these miracles come to be, some quarters are speculating that it may be the result of a modified version of the serum that turned





Steve Rogers into Captain America, similar to how Bucky Barnes was altered (and given a badass robot arm) to become the ubercool Winter Soldier. And given how Pietro and Wanda become a part of the second wave of the comic book Avengers team, plus the whole notion of *Civil War* on the horizon, chances are the pair will be playing a vital role in the future of the MCU.

POWERS AND INTRODUCTIONS

As far as the Marvel comic book world goes, Pietro and Wanda Maximoff debuted back in March 1964's X-Men #4. Since then, they've had their fair share of revelations, and the Scarlet Witch in particular has had a huge effect on the entire Marvel world.

Like so many, the characters were created by the legendary team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Whilst they are known as important early members of the Avengers, the pair's initial appearances were as villains and as a part of Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. Spotting their potential for greater things, it took only until May 1965's Avengers #16 before the brother and sister were made members of Earth's Mightiest Heroes after Iron Man, Thor, Wasp, and Hank Pym decided to take a break from the team. Despite appearing in various incarnations of the Avengers team over the years, the duo also maintained a presence in the X-Men titles. Similarly, whilst they would flit between the Avengers and X-Men teams, the twosome would also sometimes drift from their hero moments to some darker routes.

In terms of powers, the siblings vary vastly. Quicksilver is pretty standard with what he does: goes fast. A lot. If you're not too familiar with him, think of him as a silverhaired version of DC's famed Flash, but a bit cockier and a whole lot more impatient. So he travels at super-speed - that's it. There's a little more to it at times, but that's the basic description of his abilities. Now Wanda, she's a little different. And by different, we mean she has the ability to literally



change the world. To expand, the Scarlet Witch's powers have often been labelled as probability altering and reality warping. She can, essentially, make the unlikeliest of events happen in the blink of an eye and in extreme instances (and there's been a few) she can completely alter the whole Marvel Universe with what is dubbed 'Chaos Magic'. Safe to say, if you were Quicksilver, you'd be feeling a little hard done by in terms of how the family powers were dished out. Then again, the Scarlet Witch does have the tendency to go absolutely batshit crazy from time to time. And when it comes to the family element of Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch, there's plenty to explore.

FAMILY TIES AND A BOND TOO FAR

For those not familiar with Pietro and Wanda Maximoff, their familial roots are just a little complicated. Beginning in Avengers #185, the late '70s saw the duo's parentage explored with an arc titled The Witch of Wundagore Mountain. At this stage, no names are actually mentioned, although plenty of clues are dangled in front of the reader's eyes to suggest that their father is somebody of prominence in the Marvel world. Whilst the clichéd 'their mother died, so they were handed to another' plot was shown (complete with a bovine midwife),

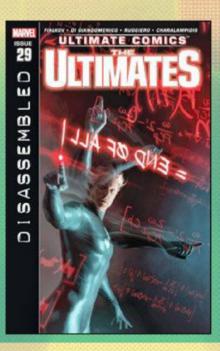
this short tale would also feature one of the first times that the Scarlet Witch had a breakdown. At least this time it was put down to Wanda being possessed by the demon spirit of Chthon.

By this point, the tease of the Maximoff siblings' daddy dearest started to gain some steam, with events coming to a head in the final part of the four-issue Vision and Scarlet Witch mini-series. Stepping forward to fill the void of the mystery father was one Magneto, with it revealed that the two had been hidden out of fear of Magneto corrupting them. Regardless of not knowing he was their father, they ended up joining Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in their X-Men #4 debut. But by this point in the game, Magneto had transitioned away from full-on bad guy and was being depicted as a more sympathetic villain in the X-world. Finally finding out that the Master of Magnetism was her father was a relatively minor incident in the world of the Scarlet Witch, and there were plenty of traumas ahead for her, which we'll get to shortly.

It's likely best at this point to drop in the family bond shared between Pietro and Wanda in the Ultimate universe. In terms of plot points that are hard to justify, this one's right up there. Let's get it out there on front street: in the Ultimate universe, Pietro













and Wanda Maximoff are involved in an incestuous relationship. Let that sink in for a moment. That'd be like the Storms, Sue and Johnny, asking Reed Richards to step aside whilst the Human Torch takes a crack at the Invisible Woman. Messed up, right? In terms of an explanation, and there really wasn't much of one given, the idea was pushed that Quicksilver had been messed up in the head due to an abusive relationship with Magneto. In the Ultimates line, Pietro and Wanda tended to spend more of their time on the wrong side of the fence, although they did still have moments where they were a part of the Ultimates (that world's glitzy moniker for their Avengers). When all was said and done, the Ultimate version of Quicksilver would die at the grave of his sister after Ultron had killed her much earlier.

CRAZY IN LOVE

Having come and gone from the Avengers after becoming part of the team back in 1965's Avengers #16, Wanda Maximoff made a more permanent return to Earth's Mightiest Heroes in April 1970's Avengers #75. Before long, she would end up in a relationship with the Vision. Yep, the same Vision who was an artificial, created by the crazed Ultron. The pair would wind up getting married in June 1975's Giant-Size Avengers #4. And what so often follows in the footsteps of marriage? Children.

Despite finding out that they only initially got together due to the manipulation of Immortus, the Scarlet Witch and Vision were completely loved up. Thing is, how do you make a baby with an android? Why, you pull on magic energy, of course! And 'magic energy' was by no means a nickname for the Vision's RoboCock. Wanda would become pregnant and eventually give birth to two twin boys, Tommy and Billy. Surely it can't be that easy, though, right? Of course it can't! It was soon revealed that the energy used to create Wanda's twin sons was that of the demon Mephisto (we're pretty sure that was one of Jeremy Kyle's more extreme DNA tests). If that wasn't enough to irk the Scarlet Witch, Mephisto would resurface and absorb the children, essentially erasing them from existence.

Using a perk of her powers, Wanda summoned the spirit of deceased mentor Agatha Harkness and got her to put a spell on the Scarlet Witch that would help her to forget her loss. So that's that then, surely? Again, more suffering was to come for Wanda Maximoff...

THE HOUSE OF M

The memory of her lost children would eventually come back to the Scarlet Witch, but she managed to keep a grip on things relatively well for the next several years, and she would go on to become a cornerstone of many an Avengers team. As for brother Pietro, it's a little harsh but fair to say that he was pretty much a side order to his sister's main course by this point. Quicksilver would have a couple of his own solo series over the years, and he would come and go between the X-Men, Avengers, and Brotherhood of Evil Mutants seemingly on a weekly basis. But the Maximoff family would play in a key



role in the Marvel world once more with a little storyline by the name of House of M.

Having had her problems with Vision and Wonder Man (the person who the Vision's personality was based on), essentially losing her husband and her children, a throwaway comment from Wasp set Wanda off... And by off, we mean she went full-on crazy and having a nervous breakdown that resulted in the deaths of Hawkeye, Scott Lang, and the Vision. When Doctor Strange surfaced after sensing abuse of magic (which begs the question as to how Paul Daniels has gotten away with it for so many years!), there was a meeting between the Avengers and X-Men where things got mighty serious. And by serious, the topic of the day was making a decision on whether to actually kill Wanda Maximoff.











As any half-decent brother would, Quicksilver took slight exception to the notion of his sister being killed, even if it was deemed for the greater good. As such, he spoke to her in the hope of her being able to do something, anything, to fix the situation that they found themselves in. So just like that, the Scarlet Witch pulled the House of M concept out of her arse. This saw her warp reality so that Magneto and his family ruled the world, and all heroes were given whatever it is they wanted most. All good, then? Well some heroes, such as an unimpressed Wolverine, Cloak, and a resurrected Hawkeye, saw through the whole charade and tried to undo Wanda's new reality. Eventually, a battle would ensue and all would be made right... ish. Having found out that Quicksilver had initiated the whole House of M thing in his

name, Magneto killed Pietro. Then Wanda resurrected him. Standard stuff. Eventually deciding to return the world to what it once was, the Scarlet Witch changed things back, but her muttering the words, "No more mutants" resulted in 90% of the world's mutants losing their powers in an event that would be known as M-Day.

After bending reality and changing the world, Wanda Maximoff became a recluse of sorts, seeking solace in a small village near Wundagore Mountain. Young Avengers Wiccan and Speed would try to find her, believing that they were actually her believed-dead/non-existed/absorbed-by-Mephisto (*delete as applicable) sons. This was the nine-part mini-series Avengers: The Children's Crusade, which sought to act as a form of rehabilitation for the Scarlet Witch

character. At this point, Quicksilver is a key member of the Avengers team and so uses his position to do what he can to find and help his sister. And yes, Wanda's sons are indeed alive and well once more.

Oh and if all of this wasn't enough, the Axis storyline of recent times revealed that Magneto actually isn't the father of Wanda and Pietro. As ever with comic books, that's just a further example of never getting too comfortable in believing what you have read for so many years.

There we have it, a brief introduction to Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, highlighting them and some of the more important comic book moments that they've been involved in. Now it's time to sit back and enjoy what Joss Whedon brings to the characters in Avengers: Age of Ultron...









Seemingly, the golden rule of comic books is to never get too comfortable with what you're reading. For when you start to get content and complacent with your understanding of the world that you're immersed in and the story arcs you've read, things have a nasty habit of changing. And with that, we give you MARVEL's latest relaunch, AVENGERS NOW!

Right Here, Right NOW

So what's so now about this NOW! initiative, we hear you ask. Whilst DC struggles with the whole New 52 thing and further changes, Marvel's previous big rejig was back in October 2012 with their Marvel NOW! relaunch for a whole bunch of their regular on-going books. All of the titles involved, and there were plenty of them, all started back at #1 issues. The catalyst to this was the Avengers vs X-Men arc that had played out previously, with the plan to change up the tone, style and feel of the Marvel world. Characters were given different creative teams in order to have a different take on the staples of the Marvel comic book world, with new designs, stories and continuities implemented. This event was seen as the next stage of Marvel's "ReEvolution" concept, which began in March of 2012.

Since that time, many shifts have happened within many of the Marvel universes, such as many of the multiple Marvel planes of existence being streamlined into one all-encompassing world. Or that's one of the apparent endgames, at least. Avengers NOW! would be seen as the fourth wave of change that Marvel had implemented since the 2012 reworking, and the major changes would centre on, in case you hadn't guessed it, Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Focussing primarily on individual Avengers' solo books, the event was introduced after the convoluted Original Sin arc that spread across nearly all of the Marvel titles of the time. And so in October of last year, Avengers NOW! finally launched.

The Avengers NOW! initiative would initially see its influence cast on the characters of Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Ant-Man, Doctor Strange, Scarlet Witch, Winter Soldier, Deathlok, Inferno, Medusa, and Angela. As part of this change, certain characters were

completely shook up for readers. And by shook up, we mean literally different people would inhabit some of Marvel's most memorable monikers. With change, though, comes the splitting of fan opinion.

Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes

"Turn and face the strain, ch-ch-changes..." In terms of extreme changes, the last few years of the Marvel comic book world has seen its fair share. With the whole Avengers NOW! thing, there were some hefty changes put into place, particularly when it came to Captain America and Thor. Where Cap' was concerned, Steve Rogers was taken out of the picture due to being an old codger. There's more to it than that, of course, with a battle against the villainous Iron Nail causing the super serum in Rogers to essentially become void. As a result,

Rogers would actually physically take on his real age, making him in the region of 90 years old. In the aftermath of this, Steve placed the Captain America moniker onto the shoulders of Sam Wilson, aka Falcon, whilst he found himself a cosy chair to go with his pipe, slippers and Last of the Summer Wine reruns. And so began All-New Captain America in November of last year. In fairness, Steve has managed to stay involved in the hero effort, as his mind is still what it once was; just these days, he has to call the shots from a safe haven base where he oversees all things Avengers. Think of him as Batman Beyond's Bruce Wayne to Sam Wilson's Terry McGinnis. Whereas previously it was mainly Bucky Barnes who would pick up the Cap' mantle during any Steve Rogers absence, this time it was deemed that Wilson would be the one to take on the shield. Oh, and Wilson also still uses





his wings as part of his Cap' get-up, although to us they still look a little clunky and out of place on the famed Captain America outfit.

Now Sam Wilson becoming Captain America in the Marvel world was one that caused a mild murmur in the comic book community, but the changes to Thor caused the Internet to have a mini breakdown. While the Captain America title was handed over to somebody already so closely tied to Steve Rogers and somebody who has long carried an Avengers membership card, Thor would be stripped of his manhood. Literally. It wasn't anything quite as sinister as "We'll cut off your Johnson, Lebowski" but the mantle of Thor now resides on a female form.

When the more familiar Thor Odinson is told something shocking (and currently still unknown to readers) by Nick Fury, it makes him unworthy for the "Thor" moniker. As such, it also deems him incapable of lifting his weapon of choice and everyone's favourite DIY tool, Mjölnir. Going to battle with Malekith the Accursed, Thor uses the trusty battle axe known as Jarnbjorn (sounding ever so much like a fifth member of ABBA) to defeat his foe. Only he doesn't defeat him, not really anyway, and actually gets his arm lopped off by the pesky Malekith. Thor would go on to attempt to lift Mjölnir once more, only to be rebutted again in his attempts. Others, such as the Warriors Three and the slightly deranged and sexist Odin, would try to claim the hammer as their own, but it would be a mysterious female who would actually lift Mjölnir and then go on to use its powers against the Frost Giants. The Thor that we know would see this and then actually give his name to this strange woman, dubbing her Thor and instead referring to himself as simply Odinson from here on out, complete with a fake arm and the same battle axe that did him no favours previously. What's intriguing is that Marvel have held back on revealing who this intriguing new Thor is (as of going to print,



at least), instead opting to tease readers and potentially lead them up many a garden path. Thor's Odinson's mother, Freyja, was initially believed by many to be the new Thor, although that now seems to not be the case as this mystery seems likely to be dragged out for just a little while longer. What is known, however, is that this new Thor is going to be a permanent fixture for the foreseeable future. Writer Jason Aaron has gone on record to say, "This is not She-Thor. This is not Lady Thor. This is not Thorita. This is Thor. This is the Thor of the Marvel Universe. But it's unlike any Thor we've ever seen before." And to think we were hoping for Beta Ray Bill to return to the series or for Thor to once more become a frog.

The Thor change is an interesting one, and not merely because it has changed the sex of a leading Marvel character. It's so often been implied and outright stated that Thor, as in the newly-dubbed Odinson, was deemed worthy because he was the Son of Odin. This latest turn of events show that he was actually worthy in spite of being Odin's son rather than because of it, adding a further layer of authenticity and sincerity to what "Thor" has done over the previous decades (well, apart from the bits that would be made non-canon by recent events).

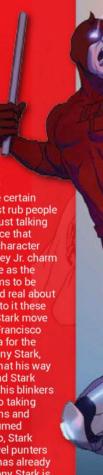
Stark Revelations

Elsewhere, the rest of the Avengers NOW! launch saw other mild changes happen, although nothing as dramatic as what had happened to Captain America and Thor. Tony Stark is an interesting one, though, for his new Superior Iron Man title looks set to continue the recent tradition of Stark being a good guy... just about. It's been teased and implicated for a decade or more, but there are certain elements of Tony Stark that just rub people the wrong way. And we're not just talking about the humour and arrogance that many now associate with the character after having seen Robert Downey Jr. charm the pants off many an audience as the cinematic Stark. No, there seems to be something more dangerous and real about Iron Man when it comes down to it these days. Superior Iron Man sees Stark move his base of operations to San Francisco with plans of changing the area for the better. Thing is, as ever with Tony Stark, not everybody always agrees that his way is the right way to do things, and Stark seems more and more to have his blinkers on these days when it comes to taking on board other people's opinions and approaches. Being more consumed than ever by arrogance and ego, Stark is even giving paying street-level punters availability to Extremis, which has already irked Daredevil. It looks as if Tony Stark is certainly on a dark path these days, and it'll

Other new titles included as part of

be hugely interesting to see how things play out for him over the next few years











the Avengers NOW! launch saw a new Ant-Man book, surprisingly a new series for Squirrel Girl, and a solo series dubbed Angela: Asgard's Assassin for Thor's sister. The uber-cool Winter Soldier would get his own series titled Bucky Barnes: The Winter Soldier, having shifted from being Captain America to once more becoming Winter Soldier during Original Sin. Bucky was thought to be dead, but instead will now essentially fill in for Nick Fury as a protector of the planet, even if he may be a little more brutal and clinical in his ways. Deathlok is another character to get a new series, with the 'how did they think of that title' book called simply Deathlok, which sees a man by the name of Henry Hayes take on the moniker in a reworking that aesthetically looks a lot more in line with what we've seen in Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. and which has been described by writer Nathan Edmondson as a series that is somewhere between RoboCop and The Manchurian Candidate

As for the cumulative Earth's Mightiest Heroes, Captain America and the Mighty Avengers and Uncanny Avengers (Vol. 2) have been launched to focus on the famed Avengers team. At this point, the team is led by Sam Wilson's Captain America and made up of Scarlet Witch, Vision, Quicksilver, Rogue, Brother Voodoo and Sabretooth. In other team-based news, S.H.I.E.L.D. sees Phil Coulson taking centre-stage, as the titular organisation brings in different heroes to help them at various points; with Coulson showing his inner geek with encyclopaedic knowledge and huge fandom when it comes to the heroes and villains of the Marvel world in a way reminiscent of his gushing over Captain America in Joss Whedon's Avengers Assemble

Wider Implications

With the Avengers NOW! phase of the greater Marvel NOW! rejig, it's caused many to question both the comic book world and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Starting with the comics, many were making a huge thing of a black man becoming Captain America and of a woman becoming Thor. We at STARBURST don't really see the big deal with either of those changes to who holds those two particular monikers. But there is a more intriguing argument that is being made by some.

being made by some.

One of the things that Marvel is consciously doing these days, be it in print or in film, is to appeal to a wider audience. That means men, women and children of all ages, races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and those who do or don't like Marmite. That's great to see, it's logical to do, and it conveniently increases the appeal of the Marvel product. Where some people are taking umbrage is with how, in this recent case, the Captain America and Thor names are being used. Certain fans and critics have argued why Sam Wilson had to become Captain America or why a female had to become Thor. The viewpoint here is why couldn't a strong black hero or a badass female character be created and made to feel as relevant or important as a Captain America or Thor rather than throwing those

monikers on characters to make them feel more relevant or important. Instead of it feeling newsworthy because a female picked up Mjölnir or an African-American took over the shield, why not focus time and energy on making Falcon feel as vital as Captain America or on creating a new character who could hang with the main event players of the Avengers and the Marvel world. It's one of those arguments, which can also to some extent be applied to Miles Morales as Spider-Man, where there are many different angles, many different thought processes, and a whole raft of controversial views. We'll let you make your own mind up on that one, and we'd love for you to get in touch with us via the usual channels in order to voice your opinion.

Away from the moderately serious stuff, the recent comic book changes could also very well have large implications on the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Make no mistake about it, Marvel have a plan. Only last year, Marvel Studios talked about how they have their films all mapped out and planned right through to 2020 and beyond. Everything that happens, be it on the big screen, the small screen or in comic books, happens for a reason. Is it convenient that the last few years saw the Guardians of the Galaxy play a bigger part in the comic book realm? No. The same goes with Rocket Raccoon now being a far more visible character in the various Marvel comic book titles. Similarly, the Inhumans have started to play a bigger role over the last few years... and now we find out that they're getting their own film in a few years' time. Then there's the Fantastic Four team becoming scarce just as 20th Century Fox's Fantastic Four is coming up for a release. So what happens in the books often reflects what we can see on the big screen

Given how Chris Evans' contract as Steve Rogers is edging closer to an end, there's strong talk that Rogers may actually be killed off in Captain America: Civil War, with A.N. Other picking up the Captain America name. Initially, it was believed that Sebastian Stan's Bucky Barnes would be the one to take over the Cap gig, but the last six months or so have seen speculation that Anthony Mackie's Sam Wilson will instead be the new Cap if and when Rogers bites the dust (the very same rumours also call for a Steve Rogers return from the grave in time for the climax of Avengers: Infinity War Part 2), which ties in nicely with what is now happening in the comics. Additionally, Tony Stark's slightly darker moments in the Avengers NOW! world, whether good intentioned or not, could be an indicator of what is to come for the cinematic Stark It's also interesting to see the likes of Ant-Man, Doctor Strange, Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver starting to play bigger roles in the books again, especially as their full MCU debuts are all upcoming.

For Avengers NOWI, the general consensus so far has been one of 'so far, so good' where most fans are concerned. Lord knows, the comic book world does need a bit of a spring clean from time to time – the key is just knowing what bits to clean and how much work they need doing. And if you're still not too keen on these changes, it could be worse – just look at The New 52!











EARTH'S MIGHTIEST

SHOW DRIGINS

A good animated series stays long in the memory. Even to this day, fans get doeeyed as they reminisce about the brilliance of Paul Dini and Bruce Timm's Batman: The Animated Series. The whole superhero animated thing started way back in 1941 with, who else, Superman. Titled simply Superman, this then paved the way for decades of superhero cartoon capers. Since then, we've certainly been given a mixed bag of shows, although the ones that really stand out to many, in terms of quality at least, are the aforementioned Batman: The Animated Series and FOX's pairing of Spider-Man: The Animated Series and X-Men: The Animated Series. Whilst some of the Justice League-based shows have also been handled well, the last decade or so has been a little light on quality animated superhero shows. There were, however, two that really stood out: The Spectacular Spider-Man and The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes! Sadly, both were cancelled way before their time.

Created by Marvel Animation and Film Roman, The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes! (or simply EMH from here on out) first debuted back on September 22nd, 2010, beginning life as a twenty-part micro-series that was made available online and on Disney XD. These episodes were just shy of six minutes long and were a way to introduce certain members of the Marvel world and give a tease as to what was ahead for our heroes. The full series proper would arrive on October 20th, 2010, beginning with a two-part episode titled

Breakout. In terms of tone and style, EMH pulled from a wide variety of comic book runs and happenings, although the basic fundamentals of the show were firmly anchored in the harbour of the legendary duo of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

What was special about the show, much like The Spectacular Spider-Man, was that it beautifully managed to feel both fresh yet somehow steeped in tradition, having a firm tie to its comic book roots. Granted, the original opening theme tune was pretty horrendous in a pop/punk way, this was reworked by the time the show's second season arrived. But to not get ahead of ourselves, within the first episode of EMH, you felt that this was a truly unique show in terms of its scope and fan service. Yes, Iron Man was initially the focus of much of the show's attention, but there were so many other characters, both heroes and villains, major and minor, who were introduced and depicted in a way that was respectful to what fans expected. Similarly, the animation style and pulling elements from the Marvel Cinematic Universe also gave an "in" to newer Marvel fans or casual viewers. So this was a show that was set to dominate the airwaves for a decade or more, right? *Sigh*...

PUTTING THE TEAM TOGETHER

After some establishing work, the initial titular Earth's Mightiest Heroes was made up of Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, Wasp, and Hank Pym and his many guises. Of course,

Captain America would shortly follow, and there would be other heroes joining in the fun at various times. The most expansive arc of the show's first season saw its origins sown in the very first episode as seventy-five villains were all released from four once-secure buildings, causing chaos in the Marvel world and bringing the initial Avengers team together. The mystery behind how this mass group of wrong 'uns got out into the world was played out throughout Season 1, with it finally revealed that the God of Mischief himself, Loki, was behind the whole thing.

Given EMH's continuing narrative and progressive storytelling, it was also impressive to see the show handle so many recurring and debuting characters so well during its run as a whole, but especially in its first season when the main aim was to establish some form of identity and style. As Season 1 progressed, faces appeared such as the Fantastic Four, War Machine, Black Panther, Captain Marvel, Jane Foster, Nick Fury, Maria Hill, Hawkeye, Black Widow, Doc Samson, Leader, Abomination, Baron Strucker, Baron Zemo, Purple Man, Warriors Three, Graviton, Arnim Zola, Red Skull, Bucky Barnes... you get the picture. And they're just some of the names off the top of this particular writer's head. Whether a character was brought in for a few fleeting minutes, for an entire episode, or for a multi-episode arc, all of the heroes and villains introduced in EMH just felt well-handled and portrayed in the correct manner. Even C and D-level names were

ANTINATEN KERNES













made to feel like they had worth, which is something that recent live-action shows like *Arrow* and *The Flash* have done brilliantly with some of the villains that they've introduced during their runs.

SECOND WAVE

The same ideal was implemented for EMH's second season, which began on April 1st, 2012, with care and attention to detail given to the introduction of further new characters and the overreaching narrative of the Skrulls and the Kree. Even more impressive in a show like this, Season 2 often looked back to goings-on in Season 1 and rewarded viewers for sticking with the show, such as when it was revealed that a Skrull had actually replaced Captain America at the end of the first season. And that Skrull storyline, not to mention the Masters of Evil and the Kree, was key to Season 2. Also heavily teased was something huge with Surtur... and by huge we mean Ragnarok. Sadly, those particular seeds wouldn't actually come to fruition by the time the show was axed, although the Surtur element did make for some pretty cool TV purely for the fact that it was used to bring the horse-faced (not to mention massive fan favourite) Beta Ray Bill into the show. Additionally to Bill, Season 2 would see the likes of Spider-Man, Wolverine, Ms Marvel, Vision, Luke Cage, Iron Fist, Doctor Doom, Scott Lang's Ant-Man, Red Hulk, Falcon, Winter Soldier, Guardians of the Galaxy, and even Galactus make appearances.

As well as respectfully adhering to what had been seen in Season 1, the second

season of EMH also saw characters evolve in a variety of ways, being it in their relationships with fellow heroes or even down to their appearance and look, most notably Nick Fury taking a more Ultimate/ MCU/Samuel L. Jackson cue. Whereas the show was changing and taking a slightly more 'Ultimate' slant, it still managed to balance this with cohesive storytelling and faithful characterisations; fleshing out its heroes and villains in a way that was always engaging and meaningful. But that's part of the show's charm: that a lot of the episodes are actually based on specific comic book issues and arcs, particularly Secret Invasion in Season 2. All of which makes it even more baffling that the show was cancelled.

DISASSEMBLED

After the second season culminated with an all-out war against Galactus, The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes! was effectively cancelled. The main reason for this was to cash-in on the success of Joss Whedon's Avengers Assemble movie by launching a new animated series that replaced EMH with one that had a whole lot more in common with Whedon's MCU team-up. So, all of the hard work put into Earth's Mightiest Heroes! — yeah, that was pretty much just scrapped and a new show created to give audiences a show that mimicked the MCU version of the team.

When this new Avengers series, coincidentally titled *Avengers Assemble*, debuted in May 2013, it was launched

alongside Hulk and the Agents of S.M.A.S.H. and Ultimate Spider-Man, itself a replacement for the similarly cancelled-too-soon Spectacular Spider-Man. It has to be said that all three of these shows have received generally negative to so-so reactions from fans and critics alike. In fairness, Ultimate Spider-Man does have some appeal to certain viewers, but for the most part fans are still yearning for The Spectacular Spider-Man and The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes! to get some sort of proper closure rather than just abruptly ending when arcs and plots were still left open and intriguing.

We guess all good things must come to an end, it's just that with Earth's Mightiest Heroes! it feels as if we were left a little short-changed by just how suddenly it came to a halt. Maybe it was because, after 1999's brief-but-awful The Avengers: United They Stand series and the ever-so-bland Ultimate Marvel animated movies of recent years, it felt as if a perfect balance had been found between giving viewers an Avengers show that both resonated with long-time fans whilst also having enough freshness and style to appeal to a whole new audience.

All we know is that the decision was made to can Earth's Mightiest Heroes! and now we're left with the comparatively awful Avengers Assemble, which is the equivalent of loving the hugely entertaining opening 10 minutes of The Amazing Spider-Man 2 only to then be given the rest of that god-awful movie to endure.







The Private War of Doctor Doom (Season 2, Episode 1)

How do you kick off a second season in a big way? You bring in Doctor Doom to unleash havoc, of course! And so it proved here as Doom pretty much handles the entire Avengers and Fantastic Four all on his own, being established as the true super-villain that he is. Seeing the FF and Avengers inter-mingle is also pretty cool, and we get to see why playing poker with the Hulk is the equivalent of playing chess with Chewbacca - let the Green Goliath win! As well as bringing Doom into the fold and showcasing both Earth's Mightiest Heroes and Marvel's First Family, The Private War of Doctor Doom was also used to tease what was ahead in Season 2. How did it do this? Well, Doom realised that the Susan Storm who he had captured wasn't actually the Sue Storm. Instead, it was a Skrull, which dovetailed nicely into the greater arc of the second season.



Along Came... a Spider (Season 2, Episode 13)

"Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can..." You know the ditty by now. Hell, last year saw a whole issue of STARBURST dedicated to the Wall-crawler, not to mention our feature on him in these very pages, so it's safe to say that we're big fans of ol' Webhead here at Moonbase Alpha. With that said, Along Came a Spider gets on this list not only for being another great episode of Earth's Mightiest Heroes!, but because it was the long-awaited show debut of Peter Parker. When the Skrull invasion of Season 2 leaves the general public untrustworthy of Captain America (after a pesky Skrull had posed as him for large parts of the season), Iron Man attempts to clear Cap's name by getting J. Jonah Jameson to run a story on the Sentinel of Liberty being innocent. Jameson doesn't care, citing how these superheroes are not real heroes like the police, fire service, etc. The public are so against Cap, a protest is actually going on whilst Steve Rogers is overseeing the transfer of C-level villains King Cobra, Viper and Lyle Getz from S.H.I.E.L.D. to the Baxter Building. Conveniently, Peter Parker has been assigned to photograph the whole thing, which works out for the best when the Serpent Squad attacks. One swift change later, enter: Spider-Man. Spidey would end up teaming with Cap and receiving one of Rogers' famed morality-based speeches about how actions, rather than bogus headlines, define them both.



The Kang Affair (Season 1, Episodes 17, 18, and 19)

Yes, yes, yes, it's technically cheating to include three episodes here, but The Man Who Stole Tomorrow, Come the Conqueror, and The Kang Dynasty all flowed together effortlessly as they looked to bring closure to one of the long-standing arcs of Season 1. When Kang finds out that the existence of Captain America somehow triggered his future kingdom to disappear - and his wife with it - he's none too happy. He also drops the bombshell to Earth's Mightiest Heroes that Cap's mere existence will lead to the destruction of Earth due to the Kree. Like some sort of Arnold-lite Terminator, Kang comes back to the present day with the aim of killing Sarah Connor Steve Rogers. The Avengers don't take too kindly to this, telling Kang 'thanks but no thanks', which ends up seeing a battle of huge proportions... dare we say it, cinematic proportions. The three-episode run feels as if it could just as easily play out in the big screen MCU or just as well in a classic Lee/Kirby comic. As for Kang, much like so many of the villains on show in the series, he is presented just how you'd want him to be, coming off as an undefeatable, near-mythic being from the future who easily swats away the advances of our heroes. Even when you think he's beat, such as Tony Stark hacking into Kang's Time Chair, he still comes back for more as alien forces begin to invade the Earth. And when he finally does get defeated, much like Joss Whedon's Avengers Assemble, every hero gets their moment in the spotlight to bring something to the table. And if that wasn't enough, our Avengers

even get to wear some pretty nifty

space suits.





PRODIGAL SON

BU ROAM STARHEY T'S happened. Marvel has been granted access to the beloved web-slinger for their cinematic universe. How do we celebrate? We could chant 'he's coming home' swinging our childhood Spidey costumes from the rooftops in unison, or maybe we'll joyously violate our Sony Bravias with the past two films back-to-back until its 4K resolution bleeds and withers under the strain of disappointing box office success. Its dying breath muttering the words 'but, franchise?' before it dissipates into an oozing gloop of CG effects and empty promises. Huzzah, Spider-Man is back!

Whatever you decide, it's unlikely many will be mourning the loss of Marc Webb's planned 3rd (and 4th) instalments in the Amazing Spider-Man series. While blessed with two great leads in Andrew Garfield and Emma Stone, the promise of greatness became tangled in a web of its own; with future spin-offs, poorly realised villains and dull action sequences taking the shine away from its redeeming character-led core. In comparison to Marvel's universe, it was a half-built mess. The Amazing Spider-Man 2's release last year - between the excellent Captain America: The Winter Soldier, X-Men: Days of Future Past and Guardians of the Galaxy - possibly cemented its doomed future.

News therefore of a partnership between Marvel Studios and Sony Pictures, while unexpected, makes perfect sense for both parties looking to revive excitement for Spider-Man. But agreements between billion dollar companies always come coupled with a dollop of confusion. To break it down – while Marvel can now use the character in the MCU, Sony still owns the rights and they will remain the driving force behind future Spidey projects, including the now pushed back super villain spin-off The Sinister Six, a Venom movie and an asof-yet untitled female-led superhero film.

The beaming light at the end of this questionable tunnel is that Marvel's Kevin Feige will help produce the next standalone Spider-Man film, scheduled for release in 2017. He'll also be up for grabs in future Avengers movies and for crossovers in other Marvel projects. Our first glimpse at the future web-slinger is coming next year in Captain America: Civil War.

Unfortunately, this news has kicked Andrew Garfield's Spider-Man to the curb, with reports calling for a younger actor to take the reins and start anew. Early rumours point to every young male actor in vicinity of a blockbuster franchise; with Percy Jackson's Logan Lerman and The Maze Runner's Dylan O'Brien leading the speculative pack. Both would certainly fit the classic Peter Parker mould, but sparkling Brits like Starred Up's Jack O' Connell or Taron Egerton from Kingsman: The Secret Service might be an interesting change of face. Whoever is chosen to shoot the web, this next iteration of Spider-Man is certainly going to be the youngest we've seen yet — with Marvel taking the character back to high school and back to his humble origins.

The current Avengers line-up would certainly benefit from a bright-eyed nipper. Someone to poke against Tony Stark's waning grip on the hip lifestyle, lust after Black Widow with boyhood charm, and look deceivingly wimpy alongside muscle mountains like Thor and Captain America. A relatable, human connection between these towering and godlike personalities; not only fitting nicely into Marvel's cinematic ensemble, but also setting up the emotional heart of the Civil War storyline.

But are we destined for another tedious
Peter Parker origin story? Many internet
dwellers are clutching to the idea of Marvel
Studios casting Donald Glover as the
unfortunately named Miles Morales. Created
by Brian Michael Bendis and inspired by
the Community actor himself, Miles is a
character who took Spider-Man's identity
after Peter Parker's death in Marvel's Ultimate
universe of comic books – grabbing headlines
for being the first black Spidey.

WITH HIS
ENTRANCE INTO
THE MARVEL
CINEMATIC
UNIVERSE
CONFIRMED, WE'VE
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TO BRING OUR
HOPES AND
EXPECTATIONS
FOR THE WEBHEAD'S REVIVAL.

While it would be an interesting diversion for the standalone feature, introducing a different alter ego for the MCU feels like a difficult sell for the average cinemagoer. Peter Parker is synonymous with Spider-Man like custard to creams, so the idea of inviting Marvel's most famous superhero into their gazillion dollar cinematic centre as some other bloke might place a firm cork in the hype thermometer. Also, if we were to cling to corporate phrasing, Sony's President Doug Belgrad remarked: "This new way of collaboration is the perfect way to take Peter Parker's story into the future." So it looks like Miles Morales is most likely a case of 'comment section hope' rather than potential reality.

Peter Parker's origin story could also be easily curtailed. The reintroduction of the Incredible Hulk in the Avengers is a prime example of how Spider-Man could be slotted into the MCU without another tragic rerun of Uncle Ben's death. As audiences are very accustomed to Parker's story, an intense glare at a family photograph or an extravagant dance number from Aunt May would easily enable audiences to snug back into the emotional beats. If Captain America: Civil War follows the comics, Spider-Man's role is very much the emotional tie caught between Tony Stark and Steve Roger's conflicting ideals. Basically, it's a brilliantly opportune moment to briefly introduce a new Spider-Man as a blank canvas who dances between the arguments at the heart of the Civil War.

It's the approach taken for the feature film in 2017 which should showcase Spidey's new personality. As Marvel seems to be emphasising the 'young' card, it would be wise to use this across the board to differentiate his standalone films from the rest. If Iron Man is the swaggering playboy running amok to AC/DC, and Captain America the traditional spy caper tinged with jazz, Spider-Man needs to be the youthful teenage New Yorker injection. A too-intelligent-for-his-own-good, smart-mouthed sprog who skates around to Phoenix or LCD Soundsystem; fitting into Marvel's tendency for lighthearted entertainment with wide-eved teenage exuberance.

They'd also be wise to avoid Norman/Harry Osbom storylines (for now) given how overplayed they were in past screen outings. Instead, we want to see the excellent roster of Spider-Man villains teased but never realised on screen, aka Vulture, Mysterio or Kraven the Hunter, who all feature in the original line-up of the Sinister Six. Personally, a modern interpretation on special effects whizz-kid Mysterio feels like a golden cinematic opportunity. His origins as an SFX and stunt man perhaps rubbing the wrong way with the world's attention now transfixed on superheroes who aren't constructed by Hollywood's magical touch. Who wouldn't want Marvel to go meta?

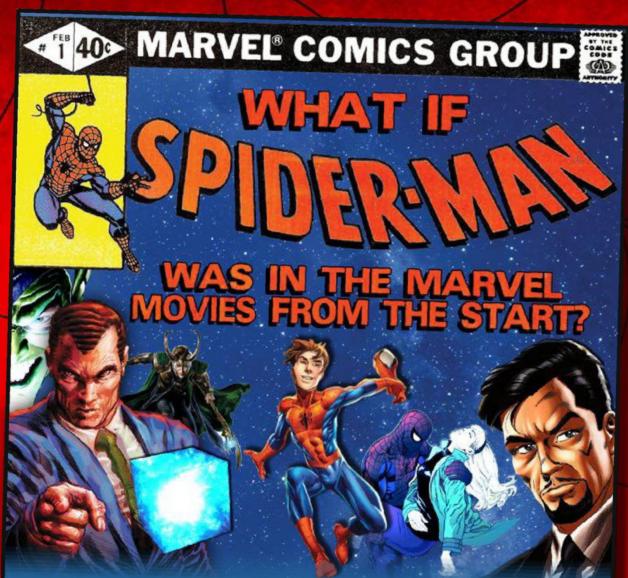
Almost as important as the villain in Spider-Man's story is Parker's love interest. While it would be tough to top Emma Stone's brilliant Gwen Stacy in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, we'd love to see the character given another shot simply to erase the terribly mishandled finale in the sequel. As Marvel is taking Parker back to high school, Gwen's reintroduction would also make sense comic-wise, and could serve as a great setup if they were to introduce Mary Jane Watson in the future. Whether he becomes caught between admirers or if Gwen's death is played-out and takes a toll on his following relationship with the redhead girl-next-door.

Another massive question hanging over Spider-Man's feature film is whose caboose is going to be planted on the director's chair. With the Sinister Six spin-off now pushed back, it seems almost too perfect for its scheduled director Drew Goddard to helm the web crawler's future. A close friend of Joss Whedon, whom he worked alongside on the brilliant Cabin in the Woods, with an eye for a sharp script, he'd be a superb fit for a Spider-Man solo outing. Plus, not to plug our own visions here at STARBURST HQ — but the meta-masterclass on display in Cabin in the Woods would be a perfect fit for our disgruntled-with-real-superheroes take on Mysterio. Just saying.

Perhaps most exciting of all, the timing of Spider-Man's introduction into the MCU means a guaranteed slot in the upcoming *Infinity War* two-part juggernaut. With many rumours suggesting we'll see an entirely new team of Avengers by the time of its release in 2018, Spider-Man could be the box office pin-up to take over Tony Stark's overwhelming popularity. Sure, *Guardians of the Galaxy* proved Marvel doesn't need their headline superheroes to make a success, but as one of the most beloved superheroes in existence, you can bet Marvel is determined to give him the cinematic treatment he deserves. Outside, of course, Sam Raimi's remarkable *Spider-Man 2*.

So excitement for Spider-Man's introduction into the MCU should rightly be dialled to hysterical. With Marvel's ongoing success and Sony's franchise failings, this cross-company collaboration should see a generous amount of creative control in Marvel's court. A brand new reboot of their most famous property handled by an increasingly daring and ambitious studio at the peak of their powers? If that doesn't spin your web, you should probably consult a doctor. Your inner child is dead.





s a fan of comic book parallel dimensions, it's about time we staged our own to lovingly chart Parker's journey if he were included in Marvel's movie universe from the beginning. We'll call it the cotton candy dimension built on whimsical dream. So how might have things played out?

Perhaps the most significant shift wouldn't be the inclusion of Spider-Man, but Norman and Harry Osborn. The inevitable presence of Oscorp would have had an entire ricochet effect across the MCU; Tony Stark may have found a not-so-trustworthy business associate, Captain America could have been unearthed by Norman from his icy slumber and Green Goblin may have even tussled for the powers of the Tesseract. If anything were for certain, Iron Man 2 would have been a significantly better film — revolving around business backstabbing between two friends competing for glory.

The friendship between Peter Parker and Tony Stark could have also been an interesting father-son dynamic: Stark building a young Peter Parker up as the protégé to his company throne, which would handsomely coincide with Harry Osborn's promotion to CEO at Oscorp. Inevitably, a clash of business vision would ensue and the circle of corporation bickering would be lovingly passed down to the next generation.

This would lead into The Avengers where Loki, instead of

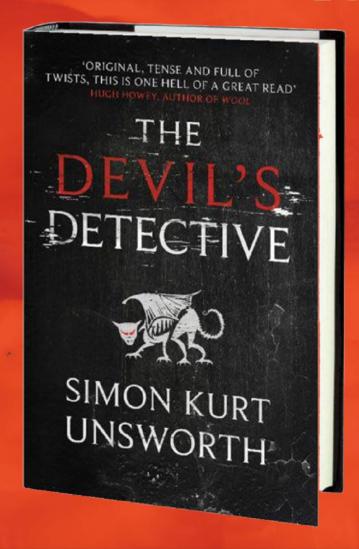
brainwashing Hawkeye, would aim for Harry Osborn once he develops his Goblin disguise. His brainwashed spell would lead to the capture and eventual death of Gwen Stacy in a climactically heartfelt scene for the ages. Not aware of his unsound mind, Parker then hunts for Harry in phase two — where he is found, teary and remorseful. Consumed by blind hatred, Parker kills him - initiating Spidey's descent into darkness and opening things up for a Venom spin-off. It plays out much like Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 3*, only without Tobey Maguire's dancing and emo quiffs.

As the other films revolve around the gathering of the Infinity Stones, Spider-Man succumbs to a downward spiral and goes into hiding. His disappearance, and the devolved S.H.I.E.L.D. after the events of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, give rise to supreme tyranny. Including Ultron, the formation of the Sinister Six and a Hulk who has hit a bottle of Jack. The upcoming film will therefore be titled: *The Avengers: Age of Shitstorm* and will go on to be a worldwide sensation.

As the threat of Thanos and the Infinity War looms over Earth, the other heroes assemble for the mightiest threat they'll ever face. Just as Thor, Captain America, Iron Man, Hulk, Black Panther, The Guardians, Ant-Man and Howard the Duck hit breaking point, Spidey comes out of hiding to rapturous screams and saves the world while a nearby busker plays the cartoon theme tune on a battered ukulele.

If only, Spider-Man. If only...

Welcome to the real criminal underworld... Welcome to hell



'DAMNED GOOD' FT

Visit www.delreyuk.com to read an extract









AS FAR AS YOUR AVERAGE MOVIE-GOING MEMBER
OF THE PUBLIC IS CONCERNED, SPIDER-MAN IS
PETER PARKER. TRUE BELIEVERS KNOW A LITTLE
BIT BETTER HOWEVER; OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS
OR SO, MARVEL HAS PRODUCED MANY VARIATIONS
OF THE WEB-SLINGER. WITH ANOTHER REBOOT OF
SPIDEY'S STORY ON THE CARDS, THERE'S EVERY
CHANCE THAT THE FILMMAKERS MIGHT GO FOR A
DIFFERENT SORT OF HERO. WE TAKE A LOOK AT TEN
OF THE MOST INTERESTING CANDIDATES...



KAINE

One of the most under-rated Spider-Man plots from the comic books is the Clone Saga. Based on a story from the Seventies, it revolves around an unstable scientist called Miles Warren who cloned both Peter Parker and Gwen Stacy. This being comic books, Warren had a super villain name, the Jackal. His first attempt at cloning Parker resulted in an unstable mutant called Kaine, who had all of Peter's powers as well as a burning touch. After much angst and a great deal of violence, Kaine eventually became a hero, though an overly gritty one, ultimately taking the mantle of The Scarlet Spider.

BEN REILLY

Parker's other clone was pretty much a perfect copy of the original; the only difference being that he was able to modify the web shooters so they could do some nifty stunts. He even had Parker's memories and is named after Peter's Uncle and Aunt. After a whole host of identity mix-ups and overly dramatic sit-com style shenanigans, Reilly was the first to adopt the handle of the Scarlet Spider. Sadly, he was murdered by the Green Goblin, allowing Kaine to take up the role instead. Reilly was in many ways a much more relaxed and considerate version of Spider-Man, a counter-point to the other two, but in the end, he was simply too much of a nice guy to live.



OTTO OCTAVIUS

Doctor Octopus has been one of the Webhead's most hated foes from the start, but the many-armed one is a super-genius, often coming up with amazing schemes. His most audacious heist was to actually steal Peter Parker's body. Otto set himself up as the Superior Spider-Man, and initially did a pretty good job; Otto formed a top science business, got Jameson off his back, reduced the crime rate in Manhattan to almost nil and even sorted out Peter's personal life. Alas, Otto's ego eventually got in the way and he was finally foiled, though not before almost ruining everything that Spider-Man stood for.



PAVIITR PRABHAKAR

Hailing from an alternate reality, Paviitr is a young boy from the streets of Mumbai who daydreams of kissing his sweetheart, Meera Jain. After a chance encounter with a yogic master, Paviitr draws upon the spirit of the spider to fight crime. Essentially a mystical version of Spider-Man, Paviitr tends to find demonically powered enemies rather having to cope with the usual super-science nonsense.



BRUCE BANNER

Babylon 5 creator J. Michael Straczynski remixed the Marvel Universe in his mini-series Bullet Points. In it, angry young orphan Peter Parker ended up becoming the Hulk and Bruce Banner blamed himself for the boy's plight. Whilst researching a cure for the condition, Banner collects samples of wildlife that were near the Gamma detonation that gave Parker his powers. One such creature is a radioactive spider, which bites Bruce. Straczynski's remix gave us a much more considered, superscientist Spider-Man, and a much wilder Hulk.

SPIDER-PUNK

Another Spider-Verse character, Spider-Punk hails from an alternate reality where all the heroes are young renegades fighting The Man. Tipping the 'Power and Responsibility' idea on its head, Punk Spider-Man is pretty much powerless against the corporate machine; luckily his bass guitar and web-slinging powers are enough to carry the day most of the time. Spider-Punk also has a very interesting look and has already been turned into a video game character. Ironically, the real-world marketing machine may mean we'll see much more of this unusual variant.





MIGUEL O'HARA

Hailing from the distant future of 2099, Miguel is an Irish/Mexican chap in a modified Day of the Dead costume. His powers are derived from a formula that attempted to replicate the original Spider-Man's powers. Though Miguel's powers are slightly different, he's pretty much a futuristic version of Spidey. In his original comic book, he mostly fought global corporations and their horrible creations. Currently, Miguel is a man stuck in the wrong time, trapped in the modern era, using his advanced knowledge to literally make a better tomorrow. More pragmatic and intelligent than the original Spider-Man, super-hi-tech Spidey is a bit of a favourite amongst fans.



The recent comic book event Spider-Verse saw Spidey's origins remixed multiple times. One very popular one-shot was a version where Gwen, rather than Peter, got the spider-bite of power. Gwen, being the daughter of a police captain, handled the responsibility far better than Peter ever did, though she still has to cope with a general public who distrusts vigilantes. The comic book was so popular that Marvel has started producing a regular series featuring the hero. She would make a fascinating addition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe.



SPIDER-HAM

No list would be complete without mentioning Peter Porker. Originally, a spider bitten by a radioactive anthropomorphic pig, Porker is Spider-Ham. He has fought the likes of Ducktor Doom and the crime lord King-Pig. Given that Howard the Duck is back on our screens, how long before this character, who has always been a bit of silly fun, makes its way to the silver screen?



MILES MORALES

Tipped by some to be the next silver screen incarnation of Spider-Man, Morales comes from the Ultimate Universe - an alternative take on popular Marvel characters deliberately written to appeal to a movie-going audience. Morales came about after writers of the Ultimate Spider-Man killed off their version of Peter Parker. The brainchild of popular creator Brian Michael Bendis, Morales has been criticised for being too similar to Parker in tone and intent, and has not, as of yet, enjoyed a lot of commercial success. Given that much of the character's backstory relies on people not knowing who he is under the mask, it will be interesting to see if he translates well onto the silver screen.



MALTER SCREEN

by Kieron Moore

AGE OF ULTRON may be the MARVEL Universe's most grandiose on-screen epic yet, but it's on TV screens where the quirky avenues and murky alleyways of this world are really being delved into...

The Marvel Comic Book Universe has long been a vast and detailed landscape featuring a diverse array of heroes, villains, and those in between. With the release of Avengers Assemble, Marvel began to create a similarly connected continuity within its film series, and 2013 saw the beginning of Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., this world's first foray onto television screens. Since then, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (or should that be the Marvel Cinematic and Televisual Universe?) has been steadily growing, with the real step up being the announcement of four original series to be released on Netflix, each following a different hero, followed by team-up mini-series The Defenders. Let's don our vigilante masks and wear our S.H.I.E.L.D. badges with pride as we investigate all that's coming up on the small screen side of the big universe.





Marvel's first attempt at bringing the world of The Avengers to television had a rocky beginning, with Season One starting off disappointingly dull. But after a tie-in with Captain America: The Winter Soldier exposed a HYDRA conspiracy within S.H.I.E.L.D., the adventures of Agent Coulson (Clark Gregg) and his crew suddenly became very exciting. The second season got off to a better start than the first, and led up to a cliffhanger that's kept us eager with anticipation.

This finally addressed one of the common complaints about Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. - its lack of superpowered lead characters. After a race against HYDRA to reach a mysterious city, Coulson's top agent Skye (Chloe Bennet) and the villainous Raina (Ruth Negga) became encased in cocoons of alien Kree origin and emerged with new powers. Yes, they're Inhumans! Skye was revealed to be this universe's version of the comics' Daisy Johnson, a.k.a. the earth-shaking Quake, whereas Raina now has claws and very shiny eyes - there's much speculation to be made over whom she'll turn out to be.

to terms with their new powers, Season Two part

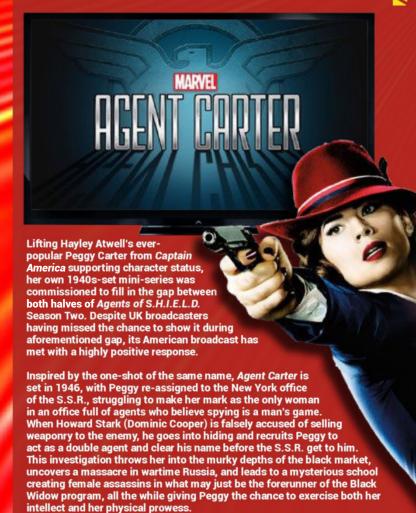




two will continue the storyline of Skye's relationship with her father, Doctor Calvin Zabo (Kyle MacLachlan), who despite not having been the best father in the past, promised he'd be the only one able to understand her transformation. We'll also see Team Coulson once again confront the traitorous Grant Ward (Brett Dalton), learn more about the eyeless Inhuman Gordon (Jamie Harris), and enjoy a second guest appearance from Thor character Sif (Jaimie Alexander). **Battlestar Galactica's Edward James** Olmos joins the cast as Robert Gonzales, while there'll be one more film release tie-in, this time with Avengers: Age of Ultron - let's just hope it's more like the Winter Soldier-inspired episodes than the forgettably inane Thor 2 one.

The run of twelve episodes should be airing soon on Channel 4 in the UK, shortly after its US broadcast on ABC.





She's not alone in this mission; Stark teams her up with Edwin Jarvis (James D'Arcy), a butler very much in the Jeeves and Wooster mode, who'll join her on secret missions but will be equally concerned about the soufflé he's left in the oven. Her colleagues at the S.S.R. include the ambitious but chauvinistic Jack Thompson (Chad Michael Murray), big tough guy Ray Krzeminski (Kyle Bornheimer), Daniel Sousa (Enver Gjokaj), who sympathises which Carter due to his crippled leg also attracting prejudice, and stern, hard-working chief Roger Dooley (Shea Whigham). The team is drawn into encounters with Dr Ivchenko (Ralph Brown), a take on the comics' mind-controlling villain Dr. Faustus, and a secretive Soviet organisation known as Leviathan.







There's also a guest appearance from Dum-Dum Dugan (Neal McDonough) and his Howling Commandos.

Agent Carter has made a strong impression on fans and critics alike, with praise being heaped on its noir stylings and its strong characterisation. Carter's expert espionage skills as she goes behind the backs of her arrogant, patriarchal bosses is evidence if any was needed that Marvel can pull off female heroes just as well as they can Captain America and Iron Man. Though it's already been seen in the States.

there's still no word

on a UK broadcast for

Agent Carter - a real

shame, as its stylish,

cheeky, and character-

rich adventures place

it head and shoulders

above its contemporary-

set cousin.





The first of the five Netflix series sees Stardust and Boardwalk Empire's Charlie Cox take on the role of Matt Murdock, who defends justice by day as a top lawyer, and uses his enhanced senses to defend the streets at night as Daredevil (apparently Ben Affleck, who wore the horns in the ho-hum 2004 feature film, is busy playing some other masked dude these days).

The series will follow the early days of the blind vigilante, symbolised by his simple black costume, which will later evolve into the iconic red-horned suit. Murdock's main love interest will be Karen Page (True Blood's Deborah Ann Woll), while Elden Henson (Mockingjay) will be his colleague and pal Foggy Nelson. Adversity comes from Wilson Fisk, a.k.a. powerful crime lord Kingpin (Men in Black's Vincent D'Onofrio), who'll have his own love story as he falls for gallery owner Vanessa Marianna (Ayelet Zurer). We'll also meet night shift nurse Claire Temple (Rosario Dawson), mentor Stick (Scott Glenn) and nocturnal bird-themed Leland Owlsley (Bob Gunton).

Showrunner Steven S. DeKnight wants the series, set in the murky Hell's Kitchen neighbourhood, to be a gritty, multifaceted crime drama, tonally more similar to The Wire than your typical superhero show, and to take visual cues from 1970s New York-set films like Taxi Driver and Dog Day Afternoon, A risky move, you could say, given that Marvel have been praised in the past for their lightness compared to DC's movies, but if there's one thing Marvel are good at, it's taking risks, and if it balances this gritty tone with their trademark sense of fun and adventure, Daredevil could really be one to look out for.

All thirteen hour-long episodes will be released simultaneously on Netflix on April 10th. Book the day off work now.

A.K.A. JESSICA JONES





Next up is a series following a superhero at the opposite end of her career to Matt Murdock – we'll join Jessica Jones after her short-lived stint as Jewel has come to a tragic end. With Dexter and The Twilight Saga's Melissa Rosenberg in charge, A.K.A. Jessica Jones will see Jones set up her own private detective agency while struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

In the lead role is Krysten Ritter, most known for playing Jane in Breaking Bad. Jones will be joined by her bestie Trish Walker (Rachael Taylor), who in the comics becomes superhero Hellcat, authoritative ally Harper (The Matrix's Carrie-Anne Moss), and her future husband Luke Cage (Mike Colter), who has a recurring role here before getting his own series later down the line. Jones' life will be shaken up by the reappearance of a figure from her past, Kilgrave – a.k.a. comics' villain The Purple Man - played by former Time Lord David Tennant. Whovian make-up artists across America are currently fighting viciously over the job of painting David Tennant purple every morning.

Expect A.K.A. Jessica Jones on Netflix late 2015 or early 2016.







Martial arts expert Danny Rand fights crime as the superhero Iron Fist. Um, that's it. That's all we know so far.

OK, we can speculate a little based on the comics. The character of Danny Rand stems from the martial arts-obsessed early '70s, when Bruce Lee was at his peak. He's the son of a wealthy entrepreneur who discovered the mystical city of K'un-L'un, but on a family outing there, Rand's parents are both killed, and their business partner Harold Meachum is to blame. Danny's rescued by the people of K'un-L'un, who train him up in martial arts. After his education culminates in a scuffle with a dragon, he returns to New York City with the power of the Iron Fist, which allows him to summon and focus his chi. And hit things really hard.

As the series is being produced on a TV budget, we probably won't see too many dragons or mystical cities, but rather it'll focus on him fighting crime and moping about being a rich orphan, Bruce Waynestyle. It wouldn't be surprising if Colter's Luke Cage showed up to bust some heads in and tell him to get over it, as the two of them often team up as Heroes For Hire.

There's a long way to go – the lead's not even been cast yet – but expect *Iron Fist* around 2016 or 2017.







We actually know the lead actor this time! It's Mike Colter. But you already knew that, because we talked about him in the *Jessica Jones* bit.

After being imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, the comics' Luke Cage volunteered for an experimental program in which doctors would pump chemical compounds in his body in the hope of developing immunity to disease. This went about as well as you'd expect such a program to go in the Marvel universe, and Cage ended up with superhuman strength and unbreakable skin. After getting out, he started using these powers to fight crime under the alias of Power Man.

While Cage has been involved in many of the recent big events in the comics' universe, it's difficult to tell which stories would be used in his own series other than him solving crimes, getting hit by big things without being damaged, and generally being badass. So that should be fun. It'll probably arrive around 2017 or 2018.







This is it. The big one. The Avengers of the Netflix posse. Matt, Jess, Danny and Luke get together for one big hero-'em-up in a mini-series bringing together all four of their storylines.

The Defenders have long been one of Marvel's main teams after the Avengers, and all four heroes, except Jessica, have been a member at some point. The two characters most often associated with the team, however, are Doctor Strange and the Hulk, who'll both have appeared in the movies by the time this comes out, so is there any chance Benedict Cumberbatch or Mark Ruffalo will pop up? Possibly - the Marvel team are increasingly fond of enforcing continuity within this universe - but don't get your hopes up just yet. Whatever happens, this miniseries should be a great opportunity to see the four Netflix heroes in action once again and cement this corner of the **Marvel Cinematic Universe.**

By the time this reaches Netflix, it'll be, what, 2018? 2019? That's enough time to get the popcorn ready...

INTO THE FUTURE

While many of these series may seem smaller in scale than the bombastic blockbusters — the films have an Iron Man, whereas Netflix can only afford a Fist — they're set to be strong, character-driven stories adding detail to a shared universe that's put very few iron feet wrong. So what if Daredevil saves the neighbourhood rather than the world — that doesn't make the fact that he's a blind crime-fighter any less cool. And if they live up to their potential, there's no doubt that Marvel have bigger things for the Agents and Defenders to save in the future...

311111111

A look at some great, good and downright bizarre **AVENGERS** merchandise! BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

head of Joss Whedon's anticipated Avengers: Age of Ultron, we take a moment to see how tead of Joss Whedon's anticipated Avengers: Age of Ultron, we take a moment to see how these agents of yield have assembled in stores. We all know of the saturation of hammers, helmets and shields in toy stores and the shelves upon shelves of superhero figures, helmets and shields in toy stores and the shelves upon shelves of superhero'? In the past but what of the Avengers merchandise which is a hit more 'out there'? In the past neimets and shields in toy stores and the shelves upon shelves of superhero figure but what of the Avengers merchandise which is a bit more 'out there'? In the past,

but what of the Avengers merchandise which is a bit more out there? In the past, STARBURST's walks on the wild side of merchandising have left us amused, terrified, distraught or occasionally a little disturbed... a bit like a Twiathalon. So we kept raught of occasionally a little disturbed... a bit like a Twiathaion. So we keen an eye out (no offence, Mr Fury) for the nostalgic or peculiar and armed with only a jotter and the office hulk (who's still a bit green when it comes to such adventures) we explore, once more, the

realm of the good, bad and the Hulk butt-ugly of Avengers merchandise.



AVENGERS COLOGNE

(JADS International, 2012)

Aromas Assemble in JADS International's classily presented line-up of fragrances inspired by the members of the Marvel team. Don't get us wrong, the prospect of smelling like a god or a patriot is promising, but as for the scent of a big sweaty green beast and a chunk of metal... less so. That said, there is not really too much detail on what the fragrances actually smell like, which is a bit of a negative when selling scents. This is probably a collection more for showy purposes than anything else. Speaking of showing off...

AVENGERS DESK

(Tom Spina Designs, 2014)

From the makers of the hugely attentiongrabbing Han Solo in Carbonite desk (#Want), which sold at a charity auction for over \$10,000 (to a certain J. Hutt we heard), comes this beautifully designed wish fulfiller for the Marvel loving executive. Kitted out with iconography from the heroic ensemble including Iron Man's helmet, Thor's Hammer, Hawkeye's arrows, Dr. Banner's armoured gamma chamber, Cap's Shield and Nick Fury's needle gun, this desk is epic in every sense of the word. Sadly, like the Carbonite desk, it was a one of a kind, but we can only hope that more desks like this continue to emerge from the obsessively brilliant minds of the movie loving people at Tom Spina Designs. In the words of Thor himself, "Another!"

SUPER HEROES - THE AVENGERS

(unknown, 2012)

Way back in our Batty issue 406, you may remember we uncovered the Sense of Right Alliance, a bootleg toy grouping that more or less discarded decades of comic book history and just threw heroes like Iron Man, Batman and, er... Shrek together. Well at least they made up a new team name, as opposed to this great example of bodge it and scarper. Just in case you weren't aware that The Avengers collective were classed as superheroes, this thoughtful bootleg toy collection has added that to the title. It is hard to say what we like best about this brilliant find; is it that Iron Man looks like the bastard child of a fire hydrant and a Lego block? Or that Black Widow (at least we think that's her) looks more like Spider-Man's Mary Jane? Maybe it's Nick Fury, who looks like an ill Will Smith, or Captain America, who seems to have eaten all the Shawarma in New York! No, we know what it is; it's that awe-inspiring box art, which has a baffling pic of a random lady (probably from a comic convention) in costume as Ms Marvel thrown in alongside the movie stills. Sold!





AVENGERS MALE G-STRING

(Poppyswickedgarden, 2013)

Yes, well, as clothing products go, this one is a bit cheeky (ahem). We have had a think about it and still cannot quite think why plastering the Avengers all over your junk makes it all that more appealing, especially for the male dancers the product is aimed at but hey, each to their own. Although we suppose if the ladies (or men) out there enjoying the show are comic book buffs, it's a doubly effective party. That said, the idea of any of the superhero team themselves wearing such a garment seems impractical, what with all that jumping, spin kicking and sweating... Surely a comfier undergarment is required for the modern day crime fighter - though Hentai Kamen might argue that point (if confused, search that name in Google Images, all will be very clear, very quickly).



AVENGERS COFFIN BAG

(Comatoast Coffin Co., 2015)

Nothing says I love you like a death shaped bag. Well, apparently so because, there are actually a few variations of coffin shaped bags via the talented craftspeople at Comatoast Coffin Co. The basic idea is that these coffin shaped cases/handbags can be made for you to store whatever you might need during your day. This case is plastered in the comic book art of the main Avengers cast and among the best looking of the bunch. Seems a bit morbid though, almost like you're carrying a small dead Avenger around with you. Still, the bag should provide plenty of room for your general modern gear and maybe (in the far more awesome future) your scannable Mark VII Iron Man suit wrist cuffs... allow us to dream won't you?!



(Mead Products, 1975)

What school kid could turn down these school supplies, which were perfect for showing off your love of larger than life, page-dwelling superheroes. Mead Product's School items were of fine quality and to this day, school supplies continue to be ever invaded by popular culture and the heroes of the big screen. However back in 1975, Mead's well-packaged collection of goodies was enough to get you over the 'back to school' blues... Ok not so much, but with the additional extra of iron-on transfers of your favourite city-savers, at least you got something for all the boring homework, bullies and volcanically tempered teachers that were to come in the new term.







(Duck and Cover, 2012)

Hulk, Splash! Iron Swam! Quack Widow, we can go on all day! Seriously though, and all puns aside, this rather cute collection of Rubber Ducks- with an Avengers twist- is great fun. Made by the gifted hands of Ainsley Pinkowitz, our favourite is undoubtedly the Ducky Hulk - look at that hair! Adorable. Even the god of mischief himself would find it hard to turn these away from a hot bath, although we don't fancy Ducky Thor's chances in deep water with Loki. That'd certainly have stumped ol' Fury in the film wouldn't it, "Let me know if 'real power' wants a magazine or something".

"Well, I would like a Rubber Duck for my bath, if you please."







AVENGERS? SLEEVELESS SHIRT

(Punto Nio, 2013)

People with comic book OCD may want to turn away as this particularly terrible shirt from Puerto Rico is full of more fail than the script for Fifty Shades of Grey. Batman we can get past, as the DC and Marvel divide has meant very little to bootleggers for years, but who in the blue hell put Jake Sully there? Not only is Avatar's Jake not a part of the Avengers, he is not even a Marvel character at all, or a comic book character for that matter!? Still the logo is at least right and Jake certainly looks pleased to be part of the team. Less Avengers Assemble, more Avengers need assembly.

MIGHTY MARVEL SUPERHEROES

(Fleetwood Toys, 1976)

In 1976, Fleetwood toys released these Marx Marvel figures in all they're fully painted pint-sized glory and this now rare collection is an affectionate collector's piece for the superhero buffs out there. Though not Avengers by name, this collection of Marvel hero figures included the group in question, alongside blind Marvel hero Daredevil (who will soon be hitting TV Screens, after that misfiring Ben Affleck led film in 2003)! This rack toy collection defines nostalgia and signifies just how much of an imprint comic book heroes had on the era.

AVENGERS BOW TIE

(Vamers, 2012)

Fed up of how men never get to exercise their style while choosing clothing, compared to all the dazzling choices ladies have? Well, here is the comic buff's chance, with this Vamers exclusive Avengers comic strip bow tie, which is perfect for livening up a drab suit. True, it has a touch of silliness about it and might be frowned upon at certain business functions. Still, if this can't save people from boring clothes, you can be damn sure it will avenge them.



AVENGERS JUNIOR DRUM KIT

(Peavey, 2013)

Perfect for doing the ba-dum-tss sound after reading all STARBURST's cracking jokes and puns. Alas, this spiffing and very colourfully printed little drum kit is for the kids (hence 'junior') and while we can't imagine any of the Avengers rocking out (well, aside from the AC/DC-loving Tony Stark), this meeting of Marvel and music is a pretty neat piece of kit (see what we did there) for the young Avengers devotee out there.





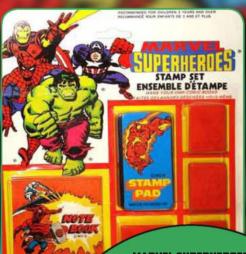
In many ways this gliding toy, or "flying superheroes with launchers" (as the box proudly proclaims) was rather momentous, as it marked the first time that the character Vision appeared in toy form. Age of Ultron marks the character's onscreen debut too, where Paul Bettany (who thus far has been the voice of J.A.R.V.I.S.) will play him, so this is a particularly apt entry on this list. Fly, Avengers, Fly was a pretty simple toy, but nicely presented and who doesn't love a gliding hero?

Or rather a plane with a hero painted on.

AVENGERS Music Phone

(Unknown, 2013)

This fake phone toy is basically a bootlegged piece of merch that is a green Blackberry-like phone stripped of all features but the button-activated sounds. Hardly something a young Tony Stark would have taken to, but with batteries included, this must have been among the more expensive bootlegged items based on Marvel's blockbusting hero team. Still, batteries or not, there is no doubting the naffness of this toy which most kids would tire of quicker than Hawkeye at a school sports day archery competition. Still, unintentional fun can be had at the box's "Have fun so much!" tagline - Hulk's been at the typewriter again it seems!



MARVEL SUPERHEROES STAMP SET

(Fleetwood Toys, 1979)

What with the recent news that Spider-Man's making his way into the Avengers onscreen universe, it seems appropriate that a lot of Avengers merch capitalised on the wall crawling hero's massive popularity. One such product is this Marvel Superheroes Stamp Set, in which Spidey takes centre stance on the box art, alongside Hulk, Iron Man and Captain America. True, this toy sounds about as exciting as helping Bruce Banner condense his logarithms. However, the clever folks at Fleetwood Toys must have taken a course in the Justin Hammer School of bullshitting, with their tagline "make your own comic books". Technically it's just a stamp and notebook set, allowing kids to have prints of some of Marvel's finest, the most prominent of which made up the Avengers.



AVENGERS MEAT

(Montana, 2012)

You have to give it to advertisers and studios; nothing is beyond having a patriotic American hero or Russian S.H.I.E.L.D. heroine slapped on it. Enter this packaged Luncheon Meat from Montana, which teamed with Marvel to promote Whedon's blockbusting adaptation in 2012. If nothing else, you might say that the effectiveness of this advertising strategy meats expectations (ok, even we'll admit that one was too much). Though kids probably delighted in those free stickers, even if they do look uncomfortably like a pack of condoms in this photo - there's an ironic joke to be made there but we are not lowering ourselves to make it.



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS FROM THE WORLDS OF DOCTOR WHO WITH PAUL MOUNT



STRANGENESS IN SPACE

Having been shrouded in secrecy, the cat is finally out of the bag on a mystery project called **Strangeness in Space**. Bringing together producer Clare Eden (**The Minister of Chance**), Sophie Aldred (**Doctor Who's** Ace), and Trevor Neal and Simon Hickson (the collective Trev and Simon who brought many a laugh to Saturday morning TV in the '80s and '90s), the audio podcast adventure will see Trevor, Simon and Sophie jettison off to space and encounter aliens, monsters, and other worlds.

The idea for this project came together after a university reunion in Manchester, with the four of them deciding that Sophie's Who affiliation would be great alongside Trev and Simon's brand of humour. "It's really going to appeal to all sorts of ages and all sorts of people," Sophie said, "Hopefully kids are going to love the idea of these strange people, these people being in space, and there's going to be monsters, aliens, but always a kind of comedy twist."

Trevor added, "We're going to encounter aliens, humanoids, and recognisable people and situations that have just a slight alien twist on them but that are recognisable. It'll be nice to just do a fresh sort of thing." Summarising what we can expect to see, Simon concluded what he hopes the series will be like: "In our ideal world, like a fantastic, epic space adventure but just with two idiots and with Sophie trying to keep some semblance of order in there."

Strangeness in Space is due to launch a

crowdfunding campaign on Tuesday, March 24th. You can find an in-depth interview with Sophie, Trevor and Simon over at starburstmagazine.com and be sure to keep up with the project by following @Strangeness_in on Twitter.

Obituary

Actor Hugh Walters has passed away aged 75. He was a veteran of three classic **Who** adventures spanning several Doctors. Firstly in a small role as William Shakespeare in **The Chase** in 1965, he then returned in 1976 in two episodes of **The Deadly Assassin** with Tom Baker's Doctor. Finally, he appeared as Vogal during Colin Baker's tenure in **Revelation of the Daleks**. Among his other credits were the original series of Terry Nation's **Survivors** and playing Charles Hawtrey in the **Carry On** drama **Cor Blimey.**



MISSY Returns in Series Nine

As many suspected and hoped, Michelle Gomez is returning as the regenerated Master, Missy. Gomez said of her return, "Things have been a little beige since I left Missy behind, so I'm delighted to be putting my lippie back on. I'm positively dying to see the Doctor again!"

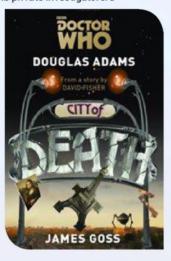
Showrunner and writer of the twoparter which will include her return, Steven Moffat said, "Everybody hide - Michelle Gomez as Missy was an instant hit last year, so she's straight back to plague the Doctor and Clara in the series opener. But what brings her back into their lives is the last thing they'd expect."

The two episodes are entitled The Magician's Apprentice and The Witch's Familiar and are directed by Hettie Macdonald, who also did the duties on the award-winning (and firm fan favourite) Blink from Series Three. The adventure will open the new series when it returns in the autumn Mills

Coming Soon

DOCTOR WHO: CITY OF DEATH AUTHOR: DOUGLAS ADAMS AND JAMES GOSS PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS RELEASE DATE: MAY 21ST

This classic **Doctor Who** story has it all; the Fourth Doctor, Romana, K9, Paris, strange aliens and art theft. Based on the original Douglas Adams script (under the pen-name David Agnew) and adapted by **Who** stalwart James Goss. The idea that **City of Death** is finally getting a novelisation is likely to make many a hardcore **Doctor Who** fan a little bit misty-eyed. Expect Mona Lisarelated shenanigans, witty writing and really dumb private investigators.



NEW WHO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



DOCTOR WHO ORIGINAL TELEVISION SOUNDTRACK: REST OF SERIES ONE THROUGH SEVEN

COMPOSER: MURRAY GOLD / LABEL: SPACELAB9 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ever since Doctor Who's revival in 2005. Murray Gold's score has become almost as celebrated as the theme tune he reworked. While lead actors and showrunners have changed, his incidental music has remained a constant bedrock. Condensing seven series' worth of his work into one 14-track best-of picture disc vinyl isn't an easy feat, but watching Christopher Eccleston, David Tennant and Matt Smith's faces rotate at 33 revolutions per minute on this limitededition release, STARBURST were overjoyed by the results.

Naturally, the LP begins with his rearranged version of the Doctor Who

theme. Originally composed by Ron Grainer, it remains one of the best theme tunes of all-time (and relative dimensions in space). From there, the backbone of the record is the numerous motifs written for the various assistants and companions, spanning the period from Rose Tyler to Amy Pond. But it's the one-note piano introduction to the melancholic Doomsday that stays with you. Haunting and menacing, the chugging violin coupled with the extraterrestrial vocal recalls Muse at their most destructive. The hymn-like Vale Decem, which soundtracked the final moments of the Tenth Doctor's life, brings the first side to

a close, before side two kicks off with the majestic I Am The Doctor - which reminds us that an understated theme can be as solid and memorable as one with huge, bombastic orchestration.

When the rolling Together Or Not At All (designed to reflect the love of Amy and Rory Pond) makes way for the crescendo of The Long Song – the "lullaby without end" sung to feed the Old God and keep him asleep in the Series Seven episode The Rings of Akhaten - it's hard not to admire the imagination and scope of it all. The tracklisting follows the chronology of the Who timeline, eliciting your favourite series' memories, so once the last notes ring out. it's difficult to decide whether to listen again or reach for the box-sets.

Technically, the release is bang on the money with minimal noise created by the super glossy and crisp, defined print. Although, due to the strictly limited edition nature of this release, we can't imagine these hanging around on the shelves of the US chain Hot Topic for very long.

In fact, if the vinyl proves anything, it's that the music contained here has been just an integral part of the success of the Who reboot as the Daleks or Cybermen. That said, you don't have to be a Fez-owning devotee of the Whoniverse or even know what the Happiness Patrol is to enjoy this dynamic collection of compositions.

PHILIP PERRY



COMPANION PIECE

AUTHOR: VARIOUS / EDITOR: L.M. MYLES, LIZ BARR / PUBLISHER: MAD NORWEGIAN PRESS / **RELEASE DATE: APRIL 7TH**

Companion Piece is a collection of more than thirty essays on the theme of the companions of Doctor Who. The writers are

all women and L.M. Myles (Chicks Unravel Time) and Liz Barr edited the various contributions (and also added some insight of their own). The contributions cover as many angles on Doctor Who companions as there are writers, making for an intriguing collection.

With a wealth of choice, there will definitely be something for every reader and the essays are never longer than a few pages. The themes are equally varied. covering personal views on writers' favourite companions, more erudite discussions of the thematics of various women (and men) who have travelled in the TARDIS and, of course, K9 and Kamelion.

Of course, we all differ and will have different favourites amongst such a rich mix of essays. Some are merely "I like X because..." but many of those give insight into the power of the show and its influence on its fans. And the writers are all fans (and in same cases, such as Una McCormack. have written for the show in various media).

The book focuses on the television continuity, though other forms such as audio, comics and novels get mentioned. The essays are written for a knowledgeable audience, but are never too obscure. While some stories don't pass the 'so what?' test. as a collection this is an admirable set. Even if individual pieces don't add much to your personal repertory of Whovian obscurata, they do present or argue their points of view well, and there is plenty here to interest any fan.

If you've ever considered contributing an essay on Doctor Who to any publication you would do well to consider how these are written, and if you are in the position of producing a publication of your own look here and admire the seamless way Myles and Barr have combined these varied contributions into a whole.

TONY JONES





WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE WHONIVERSE BY JR SOUTHALL



he idea that Doctor Who might ever have been a series entirely without a format was given the lie the moment that shadow fell across the TARDIS exterior at the end of its very first episode, way back in November 1963. The following three weeks were spent watching the regulars getting into trouble on prehistoric Earth, before eventually escaping to their next adventure and perhaps leaving just a little bit of themselves behind. As Ian says, "In our tribe the fire maker is the least important man, because we can all make fire," and while this lesson might not have hit home at the time it was given, we can see already what Doctor Who was going to be: exciting escapades with occasional life lessons thrown in for good measure. The following week, the TARDIS pitches up on Skaro, a planet not entirely dissimilar to the prehistoric landscape of the previous Saturday, and once again the four regulars get caught up in a circle of adventure,

escape, and moral constitutional; thus the precedent is set.

No series can exist without some kind of format; even anthology series like Hammer House of Horror or Tales of the Unexpected have a central principle that the audience expects to see included week after week. Otherwise, why would people bother to tune in? There have always been two reasons to follow a television series on a weekly basis; you like the characters, you like the situation. Hopefully you like both, and therein the great successes are usually made.

Doctor Who is the series we like to think can go anywhere and, more importantly, do anything. But of course, it can't. It needs a certain amount of stability in order to keep the audience coming back every week wanting to know what happens next. Generally, this would be by throwing the regulars into dangerous situations (already a format) and making them likeable enough that we

care what happens to them, but Doctor Who is a series with a revolving door for characters, and can never guarantee that the replacement regulars will be as popular as those they are substitutes for. So the programme-makers have, over the years, thrown other format elements at the series in order to offset any possibility that viewers might grow tired of either the central conceit or the regular cast and wander off to ITV. The UNIT years, the regularity of the invaded installation storylines of Series Five, the Key to Time, the Paternoster Familiars; all these things have been secondary reasons for viewers to become more involved with ongoing storylines that by definition are otherwise almost entirely discrete from one another.

Beyond the situation and the characters, one thing that most other series can rely upon as a regular fixture is the location. Whether it be the station house in most police dramas, the Rovers Return or Queen Vic, or even just the

Central Perk in Friends, there is usually a place (beyond the more general physical location of the programme) to which the regulars will repair at least once, if not several times, during the course of each episode. There's a familiarity about this, more so even than in just the street or square or city where the rest of the drama takes place, that makes this setting somewhere comfortable for the audience at home to return to as well. No matter how angry the arguments, how frightening the crimes, how upsetting the disturbances to the status quo of the situation, a rendezvous at the regular location will always provide a little reassurance as the rest of the drama plays out - and will, hopefully in the eyes of the series' producers, provide a reason for the audience to want to return week after week, as the location becomes a kind of alternative home from home for them too.

Doctor Who doesn't habitually have recourse to this sort of geographical retreat, of course, although one of Russell T Davies' clever innovations in the early days of the modern revival was in anchoring the characters and dramas in the Powell Estate, thus allowing an unfamiliar audience to familiarise themselves with the concepts of Doctor Who while simultaneously easing them in with more traditional dramatic practices.

What Doctor Who does have, on the other hand, is the TARDIS. Presented in that very first episode as somewhere dangerous and, indeed, the means by which Ian and Barbara are abducted and thereafter placed in danger week after week, it is only three short weeks before, at the end of the Tribe of Gum segment of that opening story, the ship is instead seen as a safe haven - a place to escape to rather than escape from. The Edge of Destruction (in many ways an odd one out among those early serials) notwithstanding, the TARDIS' transformation between being a place of potential peril and the secure sanctuary from the jeopardy outside is almost instantaneous. Rightly so. Viewers



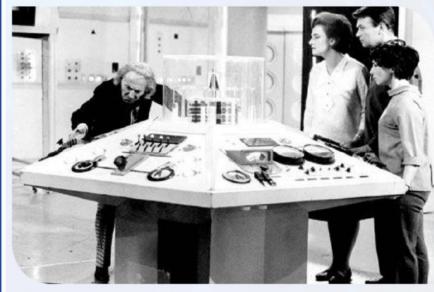
love the idea of *Doctor Who* being 'safe scares' on a Saturday night – horror movies reimagined for a children's audience, even. But a necessary part of that reassurance is not just that the Doctor will always look out for your wellbeing, but that he and his friends have somewhere safe themselves to retreat to at the end of each adventure as well. Mirroring, if you will, the audience's retreat back into living room domesticity mere moments after the latest hazard has been overcome (or left hanging to be resolved the following week).

Which is not to say that the TARDIS has necessarily become over-familiar. During different periods, writers and production teams have seen fit either to emphasise its position as a retreat, by bookending stories with scenes set within its walls (and occasionally quite extensive ones at that), or to marginalise it in favour of getting to the action. There are any number of stories that begin with the ship materialising in the location of the week and that feature no interior TARDIS scenes at all. During the early 1980s, on the other hand, the newly accentuated 'continuing drama' status of Doctor Who (brought about as a result of its relocation

to weekday evenings) saw the introduction of bedrooms for the regular characters, wherein much of the soap opera aspect of the series would take place – one of the few periods in which we see much of the interior beyond the control room itself.

Part of the fun the series has had over the years has been in puncturing the security of this safety net. Terry Nation was one of the few writers who would customarily include the endangerment of the TARDIS' impenetrability as a means of unsettling the audience; Planet of and Death to the Daleks both begin with the sanctity of the TARDIS violated in some way, and latterly Steven Moffat's version of Doctor Who - which hasn't always emphasised the peril inherent in the format in the same way as, for example, Hinchcliffe and Holmes' version once did - has sought to undermine the ship's inviolability in stories like The Doctor's Wife and Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS. Barry Letts and Terrance Dicks supervised an era of the show in which the TARDIS was removed from the Doctor almost altogether (albeit giving him the cosy familiarity of the "UNIT family" as a surrogate instead). The recently rediscovered The Web of Fear begins with the ship breached and at the mercy of the Great Intelligence.

In spite of these occasional infiltrations, the TARDIS has generally been the one constant in a series which can take place as readily in Aztec-era Mexico as it can a space station in the far future, and in which the main character can as easily be a white-haired old man as he can a fetching apparent twentysomething. It is more than just a home for the regulars and a ride from one story to the next, it is a box with magic powers, and that is just as magical in appearance. From the instant it first appeared it has been one of the continuing attractions about Doctor Who; just as the music is unique and special and hypnotising, so is the TARDIS. The people who created the series might have been largely making it up as they went along, but such is the way that things of genius are often born.



ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT.



DOCTOR WHO-MIND GAMES

urn off your mind, relax and float downstream as we take a brainbending trip to the Land of Fiction! As the name should imply, this Land is a place where fictional characters are tangibly real. In amongst the likes of Lemuel Gulliver and Princess Rapunzel you'll find the Karkus - a superhero character from the back pages of Zoe Heriot's home.

Stop dribbling at the thought of her in that Pans People-ish catsuit, as she holds onto the TARDIS console for dear life after the venerable police box explodes and come with us now...

The Second Doctor and chums arrive after being forced out of 'normal' space at the conclusion of *The Dominators*, materialising in the White Void, inhabited by White Robots. "You're interested in what's outside the TARDIS now, aren't you?".

And you've every right to be interested in the Land, created by the Gods of Ragnarok according to the novel Conundrum, as a mere plaything. They quickly abandoned it, however - being Great Old Ones, presumably they decided they had bigger fish to fry.

The Robots return in the guise of clockwork soldiers once the Land reveals itself - Jamie and Zoe are tempted to explore after being given visions of home. They're far,

far away from Scotland or the Wheel, though! What follows is arguably *Who* at its most surreal/imaginative.

JAMIE: Zoe, do you see that? Do you see where we are?

ZOE: What?

JAMIE: Look on the scanner! It's my home! It's Scotland!

ZOE: Scotland?

JAMIE: Aye! Oh. Oh, it was there.

ZOE: Oh yes?

JAMIE: Now look, I'm not seeing things, you know. It was there, I tell you.

ZOE: Really?

JAMIE: Aye. The mist must have covered it over. Aye, you get a lot of mist in the Highlands.

ZOE: So you think we've landed then? JAMIE: Yes. I mean I couldn't have seen anything, could I? Oh, just a minute. ZOE: What?

JAMIE: There's a wee gadget on here somewhere that warns you to go elsewhere if there's any danger. No, no it's definitely switched off. We've landed. ZOE: Well, I think it's more likely that you saw... It can't be, Jamie.

And of course it isn't! An unseen force is manipulating things.

DOCTOR: How do you feel?

ZOE: What happened? Where have we been? DOCTOR: Nowhere.

JAMIE: But, but....

DOCTOR: All mental images, Jamie. Pure imagination.

ZOE: But why? What's all this about? DOCTOR: I don't know. We've got to be careful. We've got to be very, very careful now.

ZOE: But, careful? But we're safe enough back in the TARDIS, aren't we? DOCTOR: Yes, possibly.

The architect of all this is the Master Brain. A rather nasty computer, it has enslaved a human writer, who rules as Master of the Land. All he wants is to return home to his own time, and so a race begins to lure the Doctor to him in a bid to have the Time Lord take his place. Gulliver isn't all he seems either, he's actually a pre-The Deadly Assassin Chancellor Goth, at a time when he's a mere Celestial Intervention Agent.

The short story Future Imperfect reveals he'd been disguised as the leading man of Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels to observe the Doctor, and eventually give him a very important mission. Teaming up with his First and Third selves, he'll

BLUE BOX SECTION

be a key player in thwarting Omega. Two regenerations later, from the Doctor's point of view, Goth will ally himself with the Master...

Exactly when the Second Doctor regenerated depends on your acceptance of/belief in the "Season 6B" theory, the central point of which being that The War Games wasn't strictly the end of his time. The novel World Game tells of his first mission as a Celestial Intervention Agent, stopping the Players from making a rather big change to the recorded history of the Battle of Waterloo by killing off both Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington.

How does he do it? By impersonating the Frenchman! Providing a handy explanation as to how he got hold of the first outfit he tries on shortly after his regeneration into his Seventh incarnation, we're sure you'll agree. "Lacks my natural humility." Indeed.

The end of the story leads into the beginning of *The Two Doctors*, Jamie back by his side following the death of his assigned Time Lady 'companion' Serena, the stress of which turns his hair grey. Why does the interior of his TARDIS look a little different?

It's a reward from the Agency for his work against the Players, a rejig in comparison to the console room we'd been used to seeing during his original televised era. The Stattenheim Remote Control he uses to summon the Type 40 to him by whistling is another one of the little perks of his service.

Back we must go to the Land of Fiction, and what of the Karkus? He's a character from *The Hourly Telepress*, a sort of futuristic newspaper/magazine. Within its pages he's the hero of a comic strip, though here he's rendered somewhat helpless when the Doctor states that his weapon, an

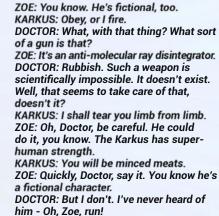


anti-molecular ray disintegrator, does not exist. He also speaks with a German accent for some reason...

Similar thinking had earlier come in handy against a unicorn and Medusa! He does, though, at least have the advantage that the Beatle-cut wearing recorderenthusiast cannot say for certain whether he's real or not.

Only when Zoe deals a blow to his male pride by besting him in hand to hand combat does he aid in their quest to get the 'real' Jamie back - the Doctor having rearranged his hardy Highlander companion's face as part of a logic test and failed rather badly!

ZOE: The Karkus - It's the Karkus.



KARKUS: You will come out and put ze

DOCTOR: What?

hand above ze head.

Luckily, he's beaten rather easily!

KARKUS: Mercy.
ZOE: You'd better submit, you know.
KARKUS: Have mercy.
ZOE: Your neck can only take a certain
amount of pressure. Do you submit?
KARKUS: I submit.
ZOE: That's better.
KARKUS: I am your slave. Command me.
ZOE: Do you know the way to the Citadel?
KARKUS: I know it.
DOCTOR: Well, well take us there, there's a
good chap.
KARKUS: I obey.

"Well, what about the Karkus and Gulliver and all our friends out there?" He'll return to his roots as a mere storybook character in the novel The Wheel of Ice, as Zoe uses his adventures to keep young Casey Laws hooked! For us, story time is over until we meet again...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY





STARBURST: Horror Channel's Apocalypse Season is on the horizon for April, including screenings of The Mist, The Day, The Stand as well as the network premiere of Planet Terror. What film are you most looking forward to seeing? Emily Booth: Of the apocalypse films, I think Planet Terror - it's the ultimate sort of apocalypse film. The Mist is actually really good. I haven't seen The Day, so I'll probably be checking out the ones I haven't seen. That's more exciting for me. It's a big deal for the Horror Channel as well, because we're making a lot of effort with the actual filming that I do for the season. We're going to an old RAF base to film all my links at Greenham Common in Berkshire. It's desolate and grim, and the sort of thing that urban explorers would find interesting. I love doing things like that, going to facilities that are now shut down and you're the only ones there running around. It's really atmospheric, creepy, cold, and grim.

Planet Terror is likely to be the film that stands out the most to casual viewers, and you just so happened to have a role in one of the faux trailers initially sandwiched between Planet Terror and Death Proof during its US cinema run... Yeah, at the time I didn't know I was sort of getting involved in this soon-to-be relaunch of the whole grindhouse era. All I remember is getting a phone call from Edgar Wright. He actually met me, and I didn't know it at the time, but he worked as a runner or something on Pervirella, which was my first film. His name wasn't on the credits, but he just came down for a couple of days. Edgar Wright, for his Don't! trailer, he really wanted people from the world of B-movies and cult movies. He just phoned me up and asked me to be in it. Ironically, it was the tiniest thing I've ever done on the biggest budget I've ever seen. That was great. But, of course, loads of people didn't see it because it wasn't released as a double bill over here.

The station has put together some brilliant seasons to date, but do you have any ideas on what subgenre you'd like to see highlighted in a future season? I've got a thing for tentacles and creatures. Don't ask me why, I don't know - it's probably very Freudian. Films that feature monsters and tentacles, I just think they're really fun and you can have a lot of fun with that subgenre. But there's hundreds of subgenres. We've just done mad science, which was fun. We get new premieres every single month, usually seven or eight, and then obviously we've got our own library of films for which we've got options on for a number of years. So when we come up with a season, it'll be premieres and then a few films that we already have. Like the Apocalypse Season, Stephen King's The Stand isn't necessarily a premiere, but it fits really well with the whole doomsday kind of thing.

What's been great about the Horror

Channel is how you guys tend to show certain films that you can't find on DVD or Blu-ray in the UK yet, such as *Chillerama* for instance.

We do have some really weird, rare, quirky films, and it literally covers all your bases. If you like those wonderfully freaky gems that don't get made now... I don't know if we've still got it, but we used to show this film called Baby Blood. It's French and so brilliant, but I would never have caught it if it wasn't on the Horror Channel. Then on the other end of the scale, they've got the light and fluffier stuff which doesn't take itself too seriously. Then there's a lot of Hammer Horror because that's just very British. Then there's the silly stuff that's like a homage to grindhouse films. And then there's the highbrow horror really, like the David Cronenberg Season or the David Lynch stuff or Dario Argento stuff, a lot of the Italian horror giallo is covered. We go from lowbrow to highbrow.

And you also show films like *Martyrs* that you wouldn't see anywhere else.

Yeah, well that was a really good season, the French films of horror. Of course there was Martyrs, which split opinion, then others like Switchblade Romance. And what about this for a season, we could do female directed horror. But we'd have to get American Mary, we could get The Babadook if they'd let us. That'd be a really good season. One of the favourite things with horror, I think for a channel, is the amount of fun and creativity you can have with it both in your seasons and in your original filming. Obviously we do our own links and I used to do Horror Bites, the show that I did which promoted what we did on the channel. Now we just do the links. What we've started doing recently, which I'm really happy about, is we're doing links the way I've always wanted to do them, which is being really creative and just letting the seasons or films dictate it. Last month I was in a morgue, a doctor's room, there was the Re-Animator shoot, there was the anatomical skeleton.





It was really cool. So now it's not me standing in front of a green screen set, this is me having fun with costumes and props. It's kind of like old-school horror hosting again. That's a good thing with horror, you can have so much fun. The guys come up with the new seasons, every month, year after year after year. It just goes to show the wide variety of weird little subgenres out there. But I'd love to see a Spanish horror season. Spanish horror is one of my favourites. The Orphanage is really brilliant. There's a film called Para Elisa, and that looks brilliant and has a really horrible, horrible poster. Then there's the Rec films, there's the del Toro stuff, there's Julia's Eyes. There's a lot of good stuff.

So how actually hands-on are you with the Horror Channel stuff, then?

Well I don't do acquisitions. I'm not in the office or anything. I'm freelance. But I am very hands-on in terms of social media, and I blog every week. Sometimes it's like Horror Channel public relations, but a lot of the time it's just stuff I want to talk about. I've got a lot of freedom with that. Like my latest blog is about horror posters that made you want to see a film.

You recently wrote, produced and starred in the short film Selkie. It did a couple of festivals last year, so when are we going to get to see it?

I know. I know. I think we should release it soon. We're still entering it into festivals so I'm not sure if I can put it on YouTube yet. I'm sure we can, but it's still doing festivals. We were in a festival in Kansas, and I'm hoping maybe to get BIFFF in April in Brussels. I want to just release it soon, but we're trying to get more of the festival circuit first. I wrote it, I didn't direct it, but I was very involved in the whole process. I was quite surprised in how much work a short film was. Even though it's shorter, every process involved in a feature film is the same in a short film, technically. So it's still a lot of time and money, surprisingly enough. I think if I did another short film then it wouldn't be anything like Selkie. It was just a sort of love letter to my hometown of Hastings and the fishing community down here. And like I said, I love tentacles. There's no tentacles in it, but it's got the whole sea creature thing.

EMILY BOOTH hosts HORROR CHANNEL'S Apocalypse Season, which runs from April 4th to April 24th. Available on SKY, VIRGIN, FREESAT and now FREEVIEW.



LIVVY BOOTE IS...

THE CIRL FROM PLANETA

s soon as a writer or director decides on a reboot, you know that they're stepping into dangerous territory. Taking something loved by many and revamping it might seem like a cool idea, but no matter how amazing the result, more often than not, people are not going to be happy about it.

The new Star Trek films may have inspired a new generation of Trekkies, but the older fans are far more divided in their opinions - are the new movies really representative of what Star Trek's all about? Do the cast do justice to original characters? Where on Earth did Spock and Uhura's relationship come from?

As for me, I'm going to remain neutral on the subject. I love both the old and the new versions of the franchise, and try to view them as two separate things. On the other hand, I can see where people are coming from when they say that reboots ruin the memory of their favourite childhood movies and series - they threaten to mess up everything you knew or loved about the original.

But what I can't understand - what I really can't understand is people getting all ruffled about reboots featuring an all-female cast. Of course, I'm referring specifically to Ghostbusters.

Now, Ghostbusters is a classic, and fans have been expectantly awaiting a third movie. So the fact that people are pissed

off that they're getting a reboot instead, well... that's fair-enough (although I think having a new cast and plot will be better than watching four old men making the same worn-out jokes about crossing the streams). But inevitably, there are fans who are uncomfortable with an all-female cast.

About as uncomfortable as some women feel when they have to sit through yet another all-male cast movie, you might say?

That being said, there aren't actually as many people upset with the Ghostbusters reboot for this reason as you'd think. Most people are just sceptical that it'll be any good, or at least better than Ghostbusters 2. However, if you're feeling particularly masochistic and want to scroll through Facebook comments, you'll find some classics.

"I'm not sure what audience this all female cast reboot is aimed at because it sure isn't aimed at the same audience the original was, are they hoping teenage girls and their mothers will flock to see it? Best of luck with that. A truly awful idea."

The urge to face-palm is so strong.
The question this anonymous person needs to ask themselves is this - if the original two movies with an all-male team were aimed at general audiences, why should a movie with an all-female team have a different effect? When a movie has a mostly male cast, everyone's so used to it

that no one questions it. But when there's a mostly female cast, it's a 'gimmick' and only girls can enjoy it. If people couldn't enjoy a movie or series because most of or all of its main character are one gender, then women would basically never watch anything other than *Orange is the New Black*.

Let's look at a couple more issues people have brought up with the allfemale cast:

"This movie is going to suck big time. I don't want to sound like a sexist pig but an all-female team? Who's stupid idea was this again. Talk about putting off all the fans of the original movie. Why not two girls and two guys."

If you think this movie is going to suck because it has an all-female team, then, yes, I'm afraid you are a sexist pig, anonymous. You point out that the movie would work with two girls and two boys - yes, it would. Teams with mixed gender can be great. But the point remains that you wouldn't be suggesting it if they'd announced an all-male team. It doesn't matter whether it's a Ghostbusters reboot or not - all-female teams are always a problem where all-male teams aren't.

"As I've said before [all-female lead cast] It just seems forced, rather than a natural evolvement."

Maybe it does feel forced, unnatural. The reason is because this is the first time something like this has happened; it's going



GHOSTBUSTERS, 1984 - Harold Ramis, Ernie Hudson, Bill Murray and Dan Aykroyd

THE NEW GHOSTBUSTERS REBOOT HAS CAUSED QUITE A STIR. BUT IS IT WORTH THE CONTROVERSY?



GHOSTBUSTERS, 2016 - Kate McKinnon, Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones and Kristen Wiig.

to make people feel uncomfortable. The best way to get used to that is to acclimatise to women appearing on screen more often.

"You thought this was another poor 80's reboot? No - no, this time instead of men guess what we're going to have as main characters?! WOMEN of all things! Imagine!"

I sense your very subtle sarcasm.

By the sounds of it, this anonymous doesn't realise how ground-breaking and unusual this really is. Having women as main characters really is just... that amazing. "Imagine!" you cry- but that's just the thing. This is such a rare occurrence that people are really struggling to. In an industry where there is so little representation of characters outside of the straight white guy, seeing a varied cast of women is strange and new and making a lot of people very uncomfortable.

And it is so important.

"I am so excited... my daughter who loves the first films is in first grade and said 'wow I didn't even know girls could be ghostbusters'... if you don't think that the film should be made... don't go see it... I think it will be awesome... girls need more movies like this"

As I've said in the past, the sci-fi and fantasy genre should make anyone feel like they could do anything - and yet, till now, it's been kinda lousy at it. This all-female team of Ghostbusters opens another door for fans into a largely male world. This reboot will make all sorts of little girls across the world believe they ain't afraid of no ghosts. This anonymous comment is proof that sometimes, we need to see it to believe it.

What's even better about the female lead cast isn't just the fact that they're women - they're also a *varied* cast of women.

Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones and Kate McKinnon are four women of different shapes, sizes, and race. If Paul Feigh had cast four tall, slim, white characters, I wouldn't be quite so excited. Why? Because they're the kinds of people we see too often in Hollywood blockbusters. This Ghostbusters cast, though, is a far more accurate representation of what everyday women are like.

The film industry seems to have a problem with portraying realistic, normal women. They're apparently just not interesting enough. So instead, we get the stereotypical tall, slim, straight, white woman - you know, to avoid controversy - but with all your ideal female characteristics to pander to the male audience. She's fierce yet obedient, sexy yet reserved in her sexuality, powerful yet gentle - and she's labelled as a 'strong female character' because she can do everything at once and land a good punch. Unfortunately, the sci-fi and fantasy genre is especially guilty of this.

But the Ghostbusters reboot already seems to be breaking this mould. I hope the movie will take it further and show audiences what a true 'strong female character' really is - a realistic woman. I hope it shows the audiences women who are funny, who are clever, women who swear, women who get scared, women who put friends first - and women who put themselves first - women who have important things to say, women who kick-ass and women who fall on their faces in the process (because it isn't as easy as it looks in the movies). I hope it'll show us that realistic women are strong, and are definitely capable of catching your stray ghost - even if they've not got a sports bra on and their hair's getting tangled up in front of their face because it's windy.

With that in mind, remember that yes, reboots can be controversial. They can be terrible, arguably. The worst thing that's ever happened to your beloved movie franchise. But - there are things to celebrate from the *Ghostbusters* reboot which are, in the end, more important than *Ghostbusters* itself.

Even if this is going to be the worst movie to have ever been made, you'll find me at the front row laughing away, enjoying myself when plenty *Ghostbusters* fans have already decided they won't.

Their loss.

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERUED

JACK HILL's iconic COFFY is getting a Blu-ray release in April. We were lucky enough to chat to the legendary writer/director about the film, exploitation cinema, focussing on strong black characters in a cinematic landscape that had none, launching the careers of Pam Grier and Sid Haig, working with Roger Corman, and a whole host more...



STARBURST: When you were making Coffy, did you ever have any idea that it would be so special?

Jack Hill: No, of course not, I had no idea.

I just really got into it. The first meeting I had with the head of production about doing this, I had no idea what this was I was doing. When I found out they wanted me to make a black film, I didn't have any idea of what they wanted me to do. When they said they wanted me to make a woman's revenge film, I saw the chance to do a picture with Pam Grier. So I got to write something especially for her. In those days, if you made a movie then it would play one summer. If it was a hit, it might come back again the next summer but then it would be forgotten. Home video and that sort of thing was just a distant dream. Foreign sales were not even really much considered with a film

JACK HILL

Photo credit: DORIAN HILL (dorianhill.com)

like that. So it was an absolute surprise to me and everybody else because they never expected such a response from what I would refer to as a white audience; what they call a crossover audience. It was a whole new idea that black characters and lifestyles might be interesting to a white audience. So that's what happened.

Given how things were very different at that time in terms of having a film focussed on black characters, was there any trepidation on your part when it came to taking on the movie?

No, I was too young and foolish to have No, I was too young and foolish to have any trepidation! I just went ahead and did it the best I could, and I thought I came up with a pretty good story. The first indication that I had of what this was going to be was when it first opened. It was a theatre in a black neighbourhood in Pasadena. I kind of went in, sneaked in, and the audience were responding and jumping up and shouting back at the screen. It was almost scary! screen. It was almost scary!

You mentioned that the film was described to you as a female revenge film, but where did the more specific story ideas come from?

It was a lot of my work. They came to me for the story. Every good writer should have read *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* by Georges Polti. He analysed how there were thirty-six basic dramatic situations, and every story ever written was a variation of one of these. I looked up revenge and I found the main elements of the story right there. That's a writer's secret that other people don't know about.

And the story was always supposed to focus

on a black female? A black woman's revenge film, that's what it was supposed to be. That was the assignment I had and that's what I came up with. It's interesting that Quentin Tarantino calls it the greatest revenge movie ever made. How can you not like a guy who talks like that?

Having worked with her previously, was it always Pam Grier that immediately came to mind to star in Coffy?
Well it was in my mind! The studio was not sure that they wanted her for it. They

had some other actresses that they were possibly considering but I basically almost made it a condition that there was no other actress that could possibly do this and what I was writing for. And besides that, she worked with me a little bit on the script. She came up with ideas that I would've never thought of, like razorblades in the afro – I never would've thought of that!

The dialogue of the film still stands up to this day, being very snappy and sassy. How easy was it to write that?

Oh, the dialogue just comes to me naturally. It's just the way I write. I can't explain it, it's just my feeling. I just get a feeling for characters. But yeah, I've been told the dialogue is really great. It's just what I do.

How is it as a writer and director to see one of your movies still so popular over 40 years later?

It's very pleasing, especially since I learned that it had been banned. I know that it had

been banned in Sweden of all places. The idea that it was banned in so many other places, I just never knew that until recently. The remarkable thing about this film and Foxy Brown is they just keep discovering a new audience, generation after generation, and they keep going. The idea of a cult film was just not even thought of in those days. If you were lucky, you'd have two summers and that'd be it. They didn't even preserve the negative sometimes. So it's really quite gratifying, especially because I thought that what I had done was to show there was an audience for black characters and lifestyles. And what happened, what really sort of ended the blaxploitation movement, was crossover movies like this showed the mainstream ministry that they could use those elements. As a little footnote in film history, I guess, it brought black characters in to mainstream film. Then there was not much room or need for so-called black films after that.

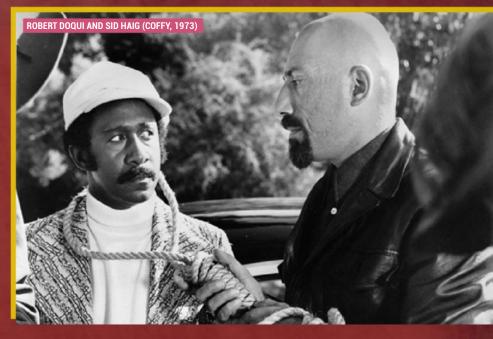
When the film was initially released in 1973, how was it generally received by mainstream audiences? It was a total surprise. The picture opened

It was a total surprise. The picture opened on the box office chart, which I'd like to mention. It opened kind of low down, but on the second week it was at the top of the box office. That was obviously just word of mouth as there wasn't much money spent on any sort of campaign. So that was, I must admit, very pleasing.

What do you see personally as some of the key launching pads to exploitation cinema in the '70s then?

I don't know, I didn't really see a lot of other films so I couldn't really comment much on that. I saw *Super Fly* and thought it was really, really well done. The interesting thing is that when you have a low budget and a limit on what you're doing, it forces you to come up with ideas. The only thing that you can compete with major pictures with is having ideas that they're afraid to do. That's the way I tried to do it.

And was there ever any resistance or scepticism from anybody in regards to the films that you were making?



Not in the studio, no. You see, American International Pictures were making certain types of movies. A black film was one type of what they thought was a genre. They figured that they could get a certain guaranteed minimum audience, so they calculated a budget based on that. In this case, it had a \$500,000 budget and they would not go over that. They figured that no matter how lousy the movie was, there would still be enough of a black audience for it. They had no idea that they were gonna get anything into the many millions of dollars in grosses!

You followed Coffy directly with Foxy Brown. Was there a lot of demand on you to make those type of films at that time?

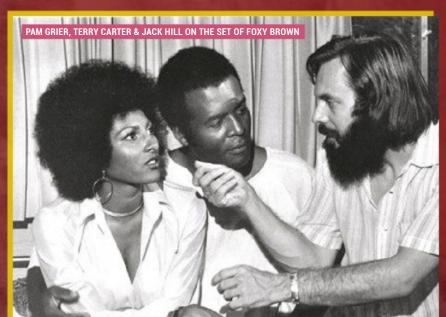
those type of films at that time?

No, it was kind of a last minute thing. In those days I had a way of ingratiating myself or not sucking up to people that I should've been because they hated directors in a way. They liked to just get rid of you as soon as possible. So they weren't even sure that they wanted me back. But because Coffy was such a huge success they had to succumb to me. Samuel Z. Arkoff [Coffy producer] I

think kind of overruled executives who didn't like me. They brought me back but they gave me very little time to do a script. In a sense the budget was the same, but I had less to work with as they had to pay Pam Grier a lot more and they had to pay me more. I didn't have too much money for cast. A lot of the things that went into it were just last minute kind of things. My feelings on Foxy Brown at the time were that I'd really used up my best ideas on Coffy. I just had to try to make the picture as outrageous and over the top as I could for lack of having a really, really good, solid story. The odd thing about it is that over the years that's become the more popular cult favourite, maybe just because of that.

As Foxy Brown was another revenge film with Pam Grier in the lead, was there any concern from yourself about people thinking that you were just making the same movie as Coffy? Well it was originally supposed to be a

Well it was originally supposed to be a sequel – the title was *Burn, Coffy, Burn!* At the last minute the sales department, which is really like the Supreme Court in a studio like that, said that sequels weren't doing business and so they came up with the title *Foxy Brown*. Everything else was almost pretty much the same. If it had been an obvious sequel then it would've made a lot more sense in my opinion. And I hated the title *Foxy Brown*, but that shows how wrong I was! But they didn't treat me well. I had nothing to do with the editing, they didn't want me around in spite of the fact that I edited my own films. I had a way of shooting that basically meant there wasn't much they could do in changing it with the editing. And they even did the final mix, which normally a director supervises. They didn't even invite me to tell me they were doing it, and they didn't even screen the picture for me; I had to go buy a ticket in the theatre to see it. I got my revenge shot a little while later when the company went out of business.





Your films helped to launch the careers of Pam Grier and Sid Haig, directing them on several films. How was it to work with those

They're both people that I got to know and got to know very well from the beginning of their careers. I liked to write for them because you get used to certain actors. Pam Grier, I didn't get another opportunity to work with her after Foxy Brown, but she went on to do other films. I don't know why we couldn't have done more, but you move on. From the beginning she was always really great to work with. Even though she had little or no experience in the beginning, she was a good learner, a hard worker, very professional, and she managed her personal life very well, which a lot of talent didn't. And Sid Haig, he was just wonderful. I met him in the Pasadena Playhouse. He was working for my teacher at ÚCLA, Dorothy Arzner, who was great and the only female director in the golden years of Hollywood. She was helping us out, she was my mentor at UCLA where I was going to school. She brought him in as she was coaching at the Pasadena Playhouse. Basically, that was the beginning of a beautiful relationship with Sid. The thing I like most about Sid, and I guess what you like too, is he does completely different characters. In *Coffy*, he's an Armenian hitman, in *Foxy Brown* he's a local bush pilot.

Modern filmmakers, such as Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, often talk about yourself as such a vital influence in their careers. How rewarding is that to hear? Well it's always a nice thing to hear. I've moved on to writing now. I'm working on a novel because I have a nice quiet place to work here with the beautiful back yard and

right by a forest with a little stream running through the back. So I'm working on things that other people can't meddle with and tell me what to do.

And in your younger days you served as an

apprentice to Roger Corman. How important of an experience was that for you?
Well I had a couple of very successful films that I did for him which got me going. It's a wonderful learning experience because he had a way of teaching how to get a maximum of effect with a minimum of means. That was very important because you learn not to waste time. For me personally, it was interesting because you don't really have time to rehearse your actors or work with them, so you kind of rely on them to come up with surprises on the set. That's what I think makes for stuff that you wouldn't get if you worked hard and rehearsed your cast. I like to have a situation where the actors are all sort of not sure, so they come up with things that you wouldn't come up with if you worked on it. Besides that, you're never on it long enough to get stale.

Given how many revered films you have in your back catalogue, is there one that manages to stand out as your personal favourite?
I get asked that a lot. I can't really say

one, although if you have a lot of kids then your first born is always your favourite. So Spider Baby is one I consider my favourite, especially considering it's really been finding an audience lately. Someone's even written a musical on it! It's gotten a few performances around, and I don't know how that's going to go. that's going to go...

We've heard of musical versions of The Evil Dead and Re-Animator, but not

Spider Baby...
Yeah, I don't know how far it's going to go. It's going in little theatres and so forth. You can even look at Little Shop of Horrors, I guess. But I'll just sit back and see what happens.

You were involved in a lot of films in the late '60s and the '70s, but the 1980s saw you step back from directing. What led to that?
The kind of genre that I had been doing.
Maybe I thought at the time that it was
a mistake, but I was having so much fun with it. I went out because the home videos started taking over the market so theatres were not looking for those kind of movies. I didn't want to do them anymore, but nobody would consider me seriously to do mainstream movies. As a director, you get stereotyped even worse than actors do.
You have one picture that's a flop but you get good reviews and you go on to major pictures. If you have a picture that's a huge success that gets terrible reviews, like I did, that's it for you. You get stereotyped as a guy who makes black pictures, and they don't count.

So the end of blaxploitation essentially saw

the end of your movie career?
The next picture I did after Foxy Brown was an independent film, Swinging Cheerleaders. It would be nice to see that movie come back - it's got its fans. But that was a huge box office hit made on a very miniscule budget, but then again it's like you get stereotyped. I really wanted to do better things. I never really wanted to do mainstream things, it just wasn't a big deal with me, and I just moved on.

How long have you been working on novels? I've just taken that up fairly recently in the last couple of years. I was doing screenplays for quite some time, but there again you have a better chance of winning the lottery as you do of getting a script made unless you have kind of a name associated with that. So the stories I had as screenplays, I'm gradually turning into novels.

What type of stories are they in terms

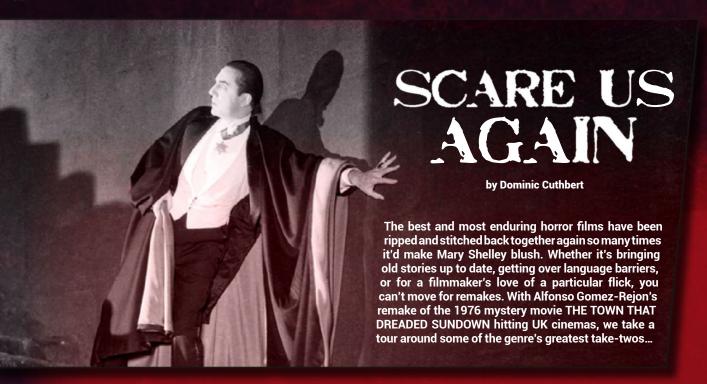
You could say literary. Hopefully literary with a crossover! That's what I'm looking for, but mostly I'm working on something just for me and that I feel really good about.

So are you working on these stories just as a hobby or is it with a view to getting them published?

No, no, that will come when the time is right and I feel like I've got something. Absolutely, sure. Some Greek philosopher said "He who writes poems no man reads writes nothing." The reason I didn't get serious about writing books sooner is that I didn't feel I had anything to say till recently.

ARROW FILMS release the newly restored COFFY Blu-ray Special Edition on April 6th.





fter the moody expressionism of Germany's silent era, led by the pivotal Nosferatu and the protohorror of The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, cinema's burgeoning lust for horror needed more oomph, more gusto, more... glamour. And with Universal's beloved monster movies, glamour was what audiences got. These precious few decades brought all the atmosphere and darkness of Gothic literature slap-bang onto the silver screen. While these horrors could hardly compare to the First World War, which had finished rearing its putrid head only years before, they did leave a lasting impression on their viewers. It's little wonder that the backbone of the genre is the consistent re-imagining of this classic canon of films. Dracula is understandably at the forefront of things, Frankenstein blundering behind, and the Wolf Man forever doomed to live in the Count's bat-winged shadow, but even Imhotep got a look in with 1999's fun but lacking The Mummy.

Whether or not you prefer Bela Lugosi

or Christopher Lee donning the Count's cape, it's Francis Ford Coppola's adaption which remains the most startling and true to the essence of the novel, despite its many flaws. Ignoring Keanu Reeves' dreadful performance, the film embraced the excess and exaggeration of Victorian literature, the architecture and Gothic splendour of the 1931 Tod Browning outing, and the blood and spectacle of Hammer's production, while injecting a fanciful dose of melodrama, eerie imagery and eroticism. Though hardly the definitive word on the vampire, it did prove that there are always new ways to tell the same stories.

Born from a desire to adapt *Dracula*, with studio Prana-Film unable to attain the rights to Bram Stoker's novel, *Nosferatu* quickly became its own beast and remains a masterpiece of horror cinema. It was a daring feat to tackle one of the most influential and important films, but director Werner Herzog never considered *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* a remake, citing a

different context, characters and a largely altered story to that of its predecessor. That said, it's still a reimagining of F. W. Murnau's 1922 classic, which realigns Nosferatu back to Stoker's original story, with a few playful twists on the source material. Crucially, the Count retains the striking appearance of Max Schreck's Graf von Orlok; Klaus Kinski is oddly sensual as Dracula, utilising the same creeping movements and imposing posture, but it's his piercing stare against an allblack background which still chills viewers. Filled with deeply haunting and mysterious imagery, it's a wonderful ode to the silent era, with the music and lighting ultimately more important than the dialogue. A counterpoint to the frame-for-frame remakes of Psycho or Funny Games, which read more like failed experiments than successes

But there did come another Nosferatu remake in 2000 with the demented Shadow of the Vampire. The film's central gimmick is exploring the idea that Max Schreck was actually a vampire, with an obsessed











Murnau prepared to make his film at any cost, even if it's the lives of his actors. The film does a pretty decent job of putting a wicked twist on history, but it's more interesting as a re-imagining of the original, telling the same story but from the point of view of the cast and crew, and offers an intriguing companion piece to Herzog's absorbing rendition.

Playwright, novelist and filmmaker Bill Gunn was approached to make a blaxploitation vampire movie in the vein of Blacula, but he wound up making the 1973 cult classic Ganja and Hess instead - one of the most fascinating takes on the vampire story this side of Guillermo del Toro's Cronos. The film follows the trials and tribulations of archaeologist Hess Green (Night of the Living Dead's Duane Jones in his only other leading role) who, after being stabbed with a cursed dagger by his assistant (played by Gunn himself), becomes a vampire. After learning his secret, Green soon falls for his assistant's widow Ganja Meda (Marlene Clark). Far from the original specification, the film ended up being a brilliant piece of social commentary and a pensive exploration of addiction. In 2014, director Spike Lee made Da Sweet Blood of Jesus, marking his first feature made exclusively from crowd-sourced funds. Described as an unofficial reinterpretation of Gunn's classic, with some sequences playing out shot-for-shot, the film falls flat, and instead of trying to iron out some of

the original's wrinkles, it falls prey to clunky dialogue and pretentious flights of fancy. A shame, but at least it threw some attention on Gunn's indie sensation.

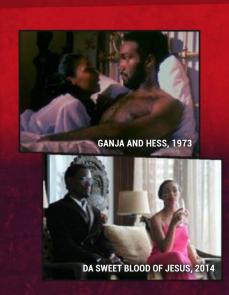
From vampires to that other most famous brand of walking corpse, Frankenstein's perpetually troubled monster. Kenneth Branagh's 1994 take on Mary Shelley's archetypical Gothic novel was all high camp, pageantry and pomp; and it's quite marvellous. While the story remains lovingly faithful to the novel, the film is shot like an overblown stage production, with Branagh making for a dashing Dr Frankenstein, stripped to the waist and swinging about his vast laboratory. What it lacks in the scares department, it more that makes up for in spectacle, with a striking performance from Helena Bonham Carter, and while Robert De Niro can't touch Boris Karloff (or even Christopher Lee, for that matter), he gives it a bloody good go.

Whether you put Frankenstein in the zombie camp is up for debate, but there's no mistaking the walking ghoulies of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. Certainly one of the best zombie movies ever made, and a biting satire of consumerism, Romero never quite topped this career highpoint again. As the walking dead limped their way into the mainstream, Zack Snyder made his feature-length debut with his 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, complete with zombies fast enough to compete in a relay race. The script

was penned by James Gunn (who'd go on to direct the hilarious Cronenberg wind-up Slither and the little-known Guardians of the Galaxy) and reduced Romero's subversive subtext into a single throwaway line. Opting instead for the shock factor of a zombie birth scene and more gore than you can shake a severed arm at; it introduced the masses to the living dead and contributed to the worldwide love of zombies we enjoy today.

Dawn of the Dead was the most successful rehash of Romero's work, but far from the first. Tom Savini, special effects and make-up artist extraordinaire, added directing to his vast skillset and in 1990 took on that most seminal of zombie films, Night of the Living Dead. This remake included Romero, alongside John A. Russo, completely overhauling his original screenplay in which he turned Barbara (played by genre great Patricia Tallman) into an altogether spunkier character, not afraid to get her hands bloody. The refurbished script recalibrated the political subtext of the thing, but didn't get at the heart of anything else. Of course, with Savini helming the project, there's much more of the red stuff, but he tried to straddle the line between gallons of gore and artistic endeavour. It's a pretty decent effort that might be just a little too close an homage to stand up on its own merit.

It might be a contentious point, but Sam Raimi's seminal splatter fest *Evil Dead II*













was just a remake of the first, which upped the blood, budget and insanity. Splitting hairs aside, there truly was a full-on remake in 2013. Fede Alvarez's Evil Dead lifts the basic context and irons it out, though sadly the just-plain-nasty tree rape scene made the final cut; and that's the film's major shortcoming - the systematic torture and goring of characters harder to care about than Fred West. This time around, the cabin in the woods formula is enabled by a group trying to help their friend kick a smack habit. A far cry from the twisted humour and inventive effects of Raimi's blackened brainchild, Alvarez proves that less really is more.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, 1990

Produced by Val Lewton, with an original screenplay based on his short story The Bagheeta, Cat People was released in 1942. Directed by Jacques Tourneur (I Walked With a Zombie and, ironically, The Leopard Man a year later), Cat People follows Irena, a Serbian immigrant played by Simone Simon, who's convinced that she's descended from a race that turns into cats when sexually aroused. As well as enjoying commercial

success, it introduced film students and writers to tension defibrillator, 'the Lewton bus'. While this formula props up most modern horror, in 1942 it was practically revolutionary. Sporting a follow-up in 1944 with The Curse of the Cat People, the film remains an important part of the Jenga tower that is the horror genre, and was given a thorough do-over with the 1982 remake. Given the sex-steeped source material, it's no wonder that prolific screenwriter Paul Schrader upped the erotic while maintaining the same sense of horror. It might have courted mixed reviews, but it stands up as a pretty faithful rework, whilst having enough room for Schrader and co. to do their own thing.

Of all horror remakes, it's slashers which most regularly get overhauled, and no matter how revered any given title is, nothing, it seems, is sacrosanct. Halloween, A Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the 13th, My Bloody Valentine, Prom Night, Black Christmas and many more besides, have all been remade to varying levels of success. Perhaps the most infamously gruesome is

William Lustig's Maniac. Released in 1980, which also introduced cinema goers to Jason Voorhees, Maniac focusses on serial killer Frank Zito who scalps his victims in order to give his manneguin collection real hair (yes, another Ed Gein-lite). Shot with a grim punky style, due in no small part to the tiny budget, and starring its writer Joe Spinell in the vicious lead role, Maniac has since proved to be a cult success and corner stone of the subgenre. Tom Savini worked his weird magic, adding to the film's enduring legacy, and making for plenty of intensely bloody scenes. In one, Savini plays the unfortunate disco boy who is on the wrong end of Zito's shotgun. In order to get the realistic effect, Savini filled a prosthetic head with blood and leftover lunch and fired a real shotgun surely an influence on that other famous head-popping scene in Scanners. Playing off Lustig's guerrilla style shoot, Franck Khalfoun's 2012 remake pitches the entire film from the point of view of the killer, played by Elijah Wood. Penned by Alexandre Aja (who also directed The Hills Have Eyes







remake), the film ditches the visual sleaze in favour of slicker production. But with its throwback score and similar levels of dingy sadism, its central gimmick isn't nearly enough to set it apart from the original.

One of the persisting reasons for remaking horror is to take chilling films from far afield and bring them to English speaking audiences. Whether that's to cash in on a new trend or capitalise on a film's success remains to be seen, but it can be an effective means of introducing folks to themes, visuals and ideas they might not have experienced otherwise. Of all the recent trends to get the McDonalds makeover, it's the chilling Japanese flicks that garnered Hollywood attention, sparking the J-horror boom in the early noughties. Pirates of the Caribbean peddler Gore Verbinski kicked off the first of these films in 2002 to huge financial success. Based on the Kôji Suzuki novel Ring, the 1998 chiller Ringu follows TV reporter Reiko (Nanako Matsushima), who is quickly embroiled in a series of supernatural deaths involving a cursed video tape. Part of the power of the original was its simplicity,

the stripped back approach, and how it subtly built a sense of terror to a frightening climax. Its restrained approach to horror is mirrored by the gentle injection of theme, which deals with Japan's clash with the modern and the simulacra of the soul.

Verbinski's remake came four years later, when the VHS had already lost a lot of its cultural significance, but a haunted DVD just wouldn't have the same pizazz. Naomi Watts is great in the lead role slowly uncovering the truth, and Verbinski does a decent job of building a sense of dread and maintaining evocative atmospheres. But it undermines the strength of the original by adding so many superfluous plot points - the scene with the horse sticks out like a sore hoof. Still, for many, The Ring was an entry point into more esoteric areas of the horror genre, and suddenly the spotlight was on Japan. There were plenty of remakes and sequels to follow, including One Missed Call, Dark Water and The Grudge, and with more incoming Ring films and a remake of Takashi Miike's seminal Audition en route, J-horror still has a stranglehold on Western filmmakers and audiences alike.

It's not just Japan; Spain is another premier horror exporter, and Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza revitalised the found footage flick with 2007's [Rec]. The film focussed on news reporter Angela (Manuela Velasco) and her cameraman Pablo (Pablo Rosso), who follow emergency workers into a building and are soon locked inside with a horde of ravenous zombies. It was remade into Quarantine a year later, which prompted its own sequel and imitators. Sweden also has its spooky successes, especially with the beautifully macabre Let the Right One In. The film dealt with a lonely adolescent boy who befriends and ultimately falls in love with a vampire, forever trapped in the body of a twelve-year-old girl. Given the film's critical acclaim and success (ignoring the CG felines), a remake was inevitable. It followed two years later in 2010, and while a decent enough play on the original, it lacked the Scandinavian aesthetic: the cold, uncompromising quality and daring exploration.







But then there are those few fleeting remakes which manage to trump their original inspirations. There aren't all that many, but those that we do have are pivotal moments. Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a rare example that did one better than its original. Based on Don Siegel's masterclass 1956 release, Philip Kaufman played off the commie paranoia of the source material and brought it up to date in 1978, with a stellar cast of Donald Sutherland alongside sci-fi alumni Veronica Cartwright, Jeff Goldblum and Leonard Nimoy. The story is deceptively simple, where health inspectors Matthew Bennell (Sutherland) and Elizabeth Driscoll (Brooke Adams) discover the awful truth that pod people are replacing human beings - aliens who take on their exact physical likeness, but lack any semblance of humanity. What ultimately sets the '78 version apart from its predecessor, aside from some gnarly camera work, is the thematic expansion that really gets to the heart of assimilation, infiltration and the self. It also proved that there is credence to remakes and that the original isn't always that definitive word.

David Cronenberg's *The Fly* took the central idea of Kurt Neumann's 1958 sci-fi horror and went completely in his own direction. Despite not having written the original screenplay (he was working on *Total Recall* at the time, which he ultimately pulled out of), Cronenberg soon signed on

having agreed he could overhaul the script. The original revelled in the fear of science and new technology, but scrimped on the transformation and body horror that made up so much of Cronenberg's early work. He made the film about the breakdown of its central relationship. This was explored in Neumann's film, for sure, but now it was a devastating and doomed story, drawing its terror from the fear of ageing and the betrayal of the body. An intelligent riposte to the B-movie schlock of the original, *The Fly* remains a genre touchstone and further proof that a quality remake often needs bold experimentation.

But perhaps the greatest remake of any horror film is John Carpenter's nightmarish take on The Thing From Another World. Carpenter revamped the film that had so profoundly frightened him as a child, dipping into the same pool of paranoia as Invasion of the Body Snatchers; exploiting the idea of an alien life form able to mimic humans, breaking down any semblance of trust and perverting the definition of humanity. A terrifying body horror whose impressive visual effects make the gut go weak even today, The Thing is yet to be knocked off the top spot. But with remakes of Martyrs, The Wolf Man and Hellraiser on the way, the future's anyone's guess. They certainly can't be any worse than 2006's The Wicker Man, can they?









This month, the maniacal Martin Unsworth unearths a classic tale of transplanted appendages and obsessive desires...

CONSUMUS PASSIONS



ased on Maurice Renard's 1920 novel Les Mains D'Orlac, the 1935 film Mad Love is a grotesque and terrifying experience even when viewed today, so one can only imagine the impact it had on the audiences of the mid-thirties. Coming not long after the first wave of films by Universal Pictures, which brought to life fantastical characters such as Dracula and the Frankenstein monster, this MGM film would focus on a much more believable and real monster - a simple man corrupted by power, love and obsession.

The setting is Paris in the (then) modern day. The **Grand Guignol-style Théâtre** des Horreurs is hosting the final performance of their star, Yvonne Orlac (Frances Drake). Sitting in a box overlooking the stage is a regular attendee. In fact, he's been at every show and is fascinated by the beautiful starlet. Unlike the Phantom who presides over the Opera House, this patron is well known to the cast and theatre staff, brilliant surgeon Doctor Gogol (Peter Lorre). Every night he watches wistfully, sending flowers to the star, but only ever talking to the wax statue of her in the foyer of the auditorium. Knowing it's





her last show, he insists on meeting her backstage, but his creepy attention sends shivers down her spine. Particularly when he's visibly crestfallen when she tells him she plans to quit the stage and move to **England with her husband, the famous** pianist Stephen Orlac (Colin Clive). She's even more uncomfortable when Gogol is invited to her farewell party. As she cuts her cake, which is decorated with a quillotine; marking the theatre company's macabre trade but also foreshadowing future events, she dishes out a kiss to each of her colleagues. When the overenthusiastic manager pushes Gogol to the front of the queue, he cannot stop at a mere peck on the cheek, but goes in for a full-on snog. Repelled, she forces her way out of the embrace and coyly attempts to carry on as if nothing has happened. This upsets the odd Doctor even more. and he leaves for home. On his way out of the theatre, he sees that the statue of Yvonne is being taken away. Rather than have it melted down for re-use, he buys it and arranges it to be delivered to his glorious Gothic pile, where it will be looked after by his perpetually drunk housekeeper (May Beatty). The new 'guest' naturally unnerves her; but for the doctor, the inanimate Yvonne is to be his 'Galatea', the statue created by Pygmalion in Greek mythology, brought to life by his attention.

Meanwhile, Yvonne's husband is travelling across country by train. En route, a notorious murderer, Rollo (Edward Brophy) is brought aboard under police escort. A former circus knife-thrower, he is due to be executed in the capital. Orlac inadvertently comes face-to-face with the killer after the man sharing his train compartment borrows his pen to obtain an autograph. While initially friendly and glad of the attention, an unheard comment sends the convict into a frenzy, with him throwing the pen at the startled man; Orlac sheepishly retrieves it from its position embedded in the wall.

Unfortunately, the train is involved in an accident, and Orlac is seriously injured, with the doctors telling the distraught Yvonne that her husband will have to lose the very thing which has made his name - his hands. She swallows her pride (and arguably her morals) and pleads with Gogol to take Orlac as a patient and work his famous wonders as a surgeon to save his hands. Unable to refuse her, he does what he can, but they are crushed so badly even he sees no option but to amputate. However, he recalls the case of Rollo, whom he had seen go to the guillotine just days earlier (the doctor having a particularly morbid interest in the execution of criminals). He arranges for the killer's body to be brought to him,

where he successfully transplants the knife-thrower's hands to the pianist's body. The miracle comes with more than one price, however. Gogol convinces Yvonne that he has actually re-built Orlac's hands, and that through various therapies and practice, he will regain full use of them. This will cost the couple all their savings, though, and even after several months of treatment, Stephen can't regain the dexterity he once had while tinkling the ivories. He has noticed that as his temper and frustration grows, as does his desire and ability to throw whatever comes to hand. This includes a shocking moment in which his anger flares and he lobs his pen at the wall, narrowly missing Yvonne and their maid. Echoing his early meekness with Rollo and the police on the train, he irrationally apologises, "This happens to be my pen, gentlemen", clearly ignoring their gender.

As the money troubles get too much, Yvonne convinces her husband to see his stepfather (played by recognisable character actor lan Wolfe), who runs a jewellery shop and fell out with him when he decided to pursue a musical career rather than go into the family trade. He receives the expected response from him, and losing his temper Orlac throws an ornate dagger in anger, smashing the window. Naturally, he's beginning to















MAD LOVE

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become more than a little concerned by the fact his hands seem to have a life of their own, and confronts Gogol, who insists that he is suffering from 'arrested wish fulfilment', speculating that perhaps he had some deep-rooted and forgotten desire to throw well as a youngster. While not a completely convincing excuse, he's placated for now, until his stepfather is found dead from a knife in the back.

Gogol decides in order to be free of Orlac and have Yvonne to himself, he must send the poor man crazy, beginning with convincing him that he murdered his own stepfather. He arranges to meet him, only in the guise of the executed murderer Rollo. With metal gauntlets for hands, thick dark glasses, and an elaborate brace around his neck, he tells him that Gogol revived him after death, re-attached his head, but removed his hands to transplant to the pianist. So only partly true. It's down to the murderous instinct still present in those hands that Orlac has been feeling the urge to throw and kill. It's all just barmy enough to be believable, and when the police catch up with Orlac, they find that he does indeed possess the fingerprints of the dead circus performer.

Gogol, in the meantime is progressing even further into his own deprayed madness. If killing Orlac Senior and framing the son wasn't enough, he begins to let his duties as a surgeon slip. Although he conducts a successful treatment on a young girl unable to walk, his bedside manner and aftercare leaves a lot to be desired. Yvonne, meanwhile, heads over to his house to find out what's really going on, and discovers his wax acquisition. She's naturally more than a little freaked out by this, but not as much as the housekeeper who is convinced the statue has come to life. When the doctor returns, cackling to himself about how he has pulled off the perfect ruse, she panics and damages the figure, forcing her to take its place. This isn't hard, since Drake herself played the immobile sculpture in many scenes. Unable to keep her composure, her movement sends the fragile-minded Gogol over the edge. Convinced his love has brought his 'Galatea' to life, he resolves that he must murder her too, with chilling reasoning, which once again quotes classical literature, "Each man must kill the thing he loves".

Mad Love was Austrian-born Peter Lorre's first American film, produced a short time after his English-speaking debut in Alfred Hitchcock's The Man Who Knew Too Much (1934). He had already made his mark in the cinematic world in Fritz Lang's terrifying classic M (1931) in

which he plays a child killer hunted by a small German town. His unique looks and mannered speech propel Lorre into being the ideal choice for the insecure and psychotic Gogol. The odd-looking star plays a tortured soul perfectly, eliciting both terror and, strangely, sympathy from the viewer. Up until his complete descent into insanity, that is.

The film itself was a remake of a 1924 silent Austrian film (simply titled The Hands of Orlac), which was directed by Robert Weine, who was riding high in acclaim from expressionist classic The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919), and brought in his star from that film, the legendary Conrad Veidt. Instead of the surgeon being behind the bizarre plot to frame Orlac, the film uses the book's original antagonist, a con man who was friends with the dead killer whose hands the pianist now possesses. A further remake would hit screens in 1960, with Mel Ferrer as Orlac and Christopher Lee as a new character, a magician who occupies the con man role. It is interesting in that it was filmed in both French and English, with both of the main actors being bilingual they provided their own voices for the French version, and is rarely seen these days. The 1935 version is unique in that the role of the doctor is elevated to villain of the piece, and the

















emphasis laid greater on obsession, love and mental illness. All of which make it even more uncomfortable and disturbing. As Stephen Orlac, Colin Clive is a jittery, gangly presence. Having played Doctor Frankenstein twice for Universal, this was somewhat of a departure, and his rather stilted and stiff delivery jars with a modern audience. But he plays the character brilliantly, displaying a strange clumsiness to the performance, but which somehow fits perfectly. Sadly, within two years of the film's release, Clive would succumb to years of heavy drinking and complications from tuberculosis aged only 37. Lorre would be one of the pallbearers at his funeral.

The film was directed with style by Karl Freund, better known as a cinematographer on such films as Metropolis (1927) and Dracula (1931), which he actually ended up helming large portions of due to the disarray the shoot ended up in. This led Universal to hand over the directing duties for The Mummy (1932). Towards the end of Mad Love, when Gogol's ridiculously drunk housekeeper is startled by Yvonne Orlac's appearance, and believes her to be the wax statue, she repeats the famous remark from Freund's Egyptian-based shocker, "It went out for a little walk!". One of the two men behind the lens was Gregg Toland, who would go on to film such movies as Wuthering Heights (1939) and Orson Welles' classic Citizen Kane (1941), which shares a similar look to the Gothic home and location of Freund's film. Filmed with a style reminiscent of the German Expressionist films, it's this look which adds enormous atmosphere, and there are some fabulous touches, particularly early on. During the opening titles, a disembodied arm smashes through a window on which the credits are written. As we're introduced to the theatre where Yvonne works, we see the highly elaborate props and costumes used to give the French audiences a shocking thrill. A body hangs lifeless from the rafters, the ticket office is manned by a grotesque 'monster' and the cloakroom attendant is missing their head. Even the performance we're shown is filmed with perverse relish. As Yvonne is seen being tied to a rack, and tortured with a hot poker, we cut to the sight of Gogol, half-hiding behind a curtain in his box seat, closing his eyes in a possibly orgasmic response to the visuals.

One of the common traits of films from the '30s that doesn't always translate well for today's audiences is the forced comic relief. This is usually in the form of a bumbling policeman or a nosey newspaper reporter. As is the case in Michael Curtiz's brilliant Doctor X (1932) and here in Mad Love. In this instance, Ted Healy plays the character. He was best known for his vaudeville career, as well as the act he created with Moe Howard, his brother Shemp, and Larry Fine. They would, of course, go on to become famous as The Three Stooges, with Healy left to find other actors to play his 'stooges' in subsequent films and performances. Although not entirely successful in Mad Love, his role and character would have provided some respite to contemporary audiences bombarded by the bizarre and horrific subject matter. Healy would also be dead by 1937, aged 41. Interestingly, on the night of his death he had been involved in an altercation with some actors and producers, which included Albert R. Broccoli (later to be producer on all the classic James Bond films) who admitted that he had pushed the comedian the night of his passing. However, the autopsy found that despite some bruising and cuts to his face, the cause of death was kidney problems due to alcoholism.

Despite being set in France, the film displays some very typical American fears; the French authorities bring in the American journalist to cover the execution, as that's where Rollo is from, "To avoid unnecessary sensationalism". Early on, when Yvonne is reminded of her not-so-secret admirer, she recoils, "Gogol – what a nasty foreign-sounding name!"

The film hit problems when it came to its release in the UK, where it was marketed under the more descriptive Hands of Orlac title, as the censors initially wanted to ban it, as they had done with Paramount's Island of Lost Souls (1933) and MGM's own Freaks (1931). It had already had almost fifteen minutes removed prior to release. Some scenes trimmed for pace, some – like the operation to transplant Rollo's hands onto Orlac – for taste. One interesting excision was a spoken introduction, which was almost word-for-word

the same as that given by Edward Van Sloan in the opening moments of Frankenstein – presumably because the two films shared a screenwriter, John L. Balderston, we can assume

MGM didn't fancy a lawsuit from Universal for using the spiel again.

It was eventually passed for release, but the progressively sadistic nature of the movies coming from Hollywood made for an effective banning of horror films in the UK, even with the newly-introduced 'H' (for Horrific) certificate. With a major outlet pretty much closed down, the studios curtailed their output of horror for the later part of the '30s. It was only towards the end of the decade when a resourceful cinema began to run double-bills of the early Universal films, that the studio resumed their series of monster films.

It's often remarked on that horror films reflect the times they were made. The early releases coming in the wake of the First World War, when scores of soldiers returned home changed. Some physically, almost all mentally. In Mad Love, it's mentioned early on that Gogol had used his expertise to repair and patch up the broken bodies of victims of war. It's quite understandable that the mental scars are much harder to accept and treat. With tensions mounting again in Europe in the late '30s, the production of horror movies would focus more on escapism rather than the depiction of graphic sadism and murder. with many films given a period setting, but almost all representing the threat of something from outside the norm.

AD LOVE



by Martin Unsworth

L. GUSTAVO COOPER

In only a few short years, writer/director L. GUSTAVO COOPER has been making inroads and gaining a following and reputation within the horror community thanks to his first shorts, and debut feature THE DEVIL INCARNATE. His latest film, JUNE, is set for release soon.



STARBURST: What inspired you to become a filmmaker?

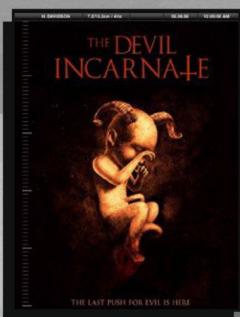
L. Gustavo Cooper: Growing up, I never thought I would be making films. To be honest, I thought I was going to be a fire fighter or a baseball player or something. It wasn't until later in life I decided I wanted to pursue filmmaking as a possible career. From the ages of 14 to 24, my life was skateboarding. As I got better, I went through a lot of skateboards, shoes, wheels. I had to figure out how to get new stuff. So my friends and I started going out on the weekends to film each other. We would be so 'psyched' after a day of filming that we would race home and edit all night long. We taught ourselves how to edit by trial and error. After making these little videos for a while, I was approached by a guy at 411VM (Video Magazine) about producing a skate show. Super-naïve I said, "Yes, That sounds rad". He told me I would have to come up with a name, so I did. It was called 'The Chronicles of Gnarnia'. We did a total of 15 episodes, highlighting friends around the East Coast. Shooting became almost as fun, or even more fun, than skateboarding. After that, I knew I wanted to make films. I stepped away from skateboarding, went to college, and the rest is history... or present. I mean, here I am!

Your first short, Velvet Road, is a different but effective spin on the zombie apocalypse trope, is it a story you'd consider expanding in the future, particularly how it could almost be an extension of the recent Ebola epidemic? Velvet Road was a short film that I wrote with my friend Alex while we were in college. It was a labour of love that many of us intended on making into a feature. I am not sure Velvet Road will ever expand to that point, but the idea is still very much interesting to me and I would love to explore it further someday.

You had only made two shorts before The Devil Incarnate, what process did you go through to get that made? I had made some shorts in college and entered the 48-hour films fest. I had made a couple commercials and music videos before that. I actually quit my job to make The Devil Incarnate! I had a really cushy job at the time, and knew that if I didn't go make a movie now, I

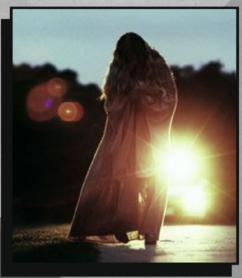
THE DEVIL INCARNATE





JUNE





never would. I teamed up with writers Coe Douglas and Jon Bosworth and we took the script to producer Jon Shepard and Executive Producer Duane A. Sikes. Duane signed off on the script and boom! - We were making our first feature!

How did you find shooting the feature compared to the shorts? Were there any particular struggles?

It was very fast, very hard, and really fun! I learned so much making my first feature. It was 12 days of chaos. We thought we knew what we were doing... the biggest struggle was time. We needed more time! I find that when you don't have time your 'ball of yarn', or story, starts to unravel. First, you get a call from upstairs to lose a scene to make-up for a long day... so you take a little out... then a little more... and a little more. All of sudden, your nice ball of yarn has suddenly run out of string and that is what you end up with on screen.

The film manages to use the first person handheld camera technique to its advantage by mixing it with traditional filmmaking, is the 'found footage' method something you're interested in pursuing?

No. I think this was a fun experiment.

I am very much fascinated with 'pretty pictures'. I want to explore the beauty of cinematography with the next couple of my films.

You created an entry for The ABCs of Death 2 '26th director' contest, which was fantastic, but wasn't selected. These films are good for getting those outside of a festival audience to watch short films, but what are your thoughts on grouping such diverse material together?

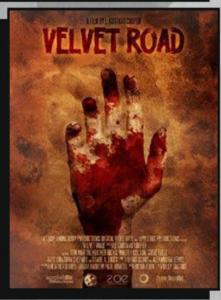
I really haven't thought that much about it. I thought it would be a fun contest to enter and it did in fact allow me to connect with many other filmmakers and new friends.

Your latest feature, June, has just finished post-production. What can you tell us about that?

We did in fact just wrap up post and currently, we are submitting to festivals and working out our distribution. I teamed up with some very talented individuals on this picture, Gregor and Jacquie Habsburg, Jessica Kill, Michelle Czernin von Chudenitz, the team at Raven Banner and Duane A. Sikes. June is a very cool film; I am really excited to share this with everyone. June is a story about a child that is unable to control this evil inside her. It's almost like a dog on a leash. Every time her emotional wall comes down, the dog attacks. I find the emotional power and innocence that we all contain very fascinating.

JUNE will be on the festival circuit later in the year. THE DEVIL INCARNATE is available in the US on DVD.









THE DEUIL INCARNATE

MOVIE REVIEW: THE DEVIL INCARNATE / CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR: L. GUSTAVO COOPER / SCREENPLAY: L. GUSTAVO COOPER, JON BOSWORTH / STARRING: GRACI CARLI, ROD LUZZI, EMILY ROGERS, CINDY HOGAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (US) TBC (UK)

Coming in amongst a glut of 'possessed pregnancy' films, it's easy to overlook or even dismiss Cooper's feature début, which would be a shame as there's plenty here to recommend.

The film follows Holly (Carli) and Trevor - nickname Boner - (Luzzi), a newlywed couple setting off on their honeymoon, video camera in hand. 'Oh, no' we hear you say, not another of those films! Well, you'd be glad to know that despite a large chunk of the film being shot from the handheld POV video camera method, it's actually not a 'found footage' film. More on that later. When the couple come to stop off in Cassadaga, a community famous for being full of psychics, Holly decides she wants a Tarot reading. After being directed by a creepy beggar to an old crone who curses the shocked young bride, Holly finds out she is pregnant.

Trevor's parents are a good sort, and have given the couple a house for their wedding present. They stick around to do the place up and generally make the place ready for a child. His sister, Marissa (Rogers) is a Goth-looking misery who is put in charge of the video camera, and told to film everything pertaining to the pregnancy. Unfortunately, this includes Holly's unusual mood swings and bizarre outbursts. Not least when one of her only relatives turns up at the baby shower, with an eerie doll as a gift. As Marissa realises that no one actually knows anything about Holly's past, she begins to dig, and finds something as disturbing as the offspring growing in her womb.

While not particularly blessed with the most original of scripts, The Devil Incarnate manages to be a brief and entertaining piece of cinema, confidently directed by Cooper. It features shocks and jumps when it needs to, without going overboard, and has an impressive sound design and complementary and unobtrusive score.

As mentioned earlier, the film makes use of both regular filmmaking techniques and those usually seen in 'found footage' films, and the mix works to great effect. Rather than rely on the cheap, hand-held shaky cam shots to build the tension and involve the viewer, Cooper utilises the trope carefully and sparingly, picking out moments which serve the purpose and combining them with the regular narrative. The traditional cinematography is remarkably good for a film of such a low budget, a quality which helps draw the viewer in to the story when it could easily have become tired and predictable. It's the brevity of the film which is actually its downfall, we are not allowed enough time to get to know the couple or invest in their predicament before shit begins to go down. As it is, it's an entertaining diversion which will help put the young director on the cinematic map.









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CINDERELLA

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: KENNETH BRANAGH / SCREENPLAY: CHRIS WEITZ / STARRING: LILY JAMES, CATE BLANCHETT, RICHARD MADDEN, STELLAN SKARSGÅRD, HAYLEY ATWELL, DEREK JACOBI, BEN CHAPLIN / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 27TH

Disney's previous attempts to inject a little life into some of their classic properties, and some cash into their coffers, may not have been to everyone's taste but at least they all tried to do something with their classic material. Alice in Wonderland gave an old location and characters a fresh lick of digital paint; Maleficent provided more background on a character lightly sketched in Sleeping Beauty - the villain; while Oz the Great and Powerful did a little bit of both. In comparison, Kenneth Branagh's Cinderella, the latest Disney revamp, plays it almost completely straight. Kind-hearted to the point of masochism, Ella (Lily James) loses a parent, gains a wicked stepmother and two stepsisters, before losing another parent and being relegated to the role of servant girl in her own family home.

Thanks to her mother's (a very blonde Hayley Atwell) parting words to, "Have courage and be kind", Ella suffers though the frankly miserable first third of the movie with little comfort apart from the company of "Mr Goose" and some squeaky semi-comic CGI mice, whose appearance, in keeping with the slightly heightened realism of most of the movie, errs on the side of realism and who are used sparingly through the film.

Of course, it's not long before a random encounter with a stranger (Richard Madden), whom she believes to be an apprentice at the local castle, inspires Cinderella to attempt to go to the local ball only to be cruelly refused by her stepmother, but magic and a fairy

godmother may have something to say about that.

Branagh tells the events of the film in a workmanlike way, but with such... restraint that it's worth asking why anyone bothered. The only real additions to the story are some minor palace intrigue, beefing up the Prince's role with family pressure to marry for the greater good rather than love, and the addition of some scheming by certain members of the royal court.

The two leads perform their duties as expected, Lily James providing a sympathetic figure, but endless scenes of her awe can get a bit wearisome, along with Richard Madden's frequent, astonished smile.

Helena Bonham Carter and Cate Blanchett provide the main draw for the film and don't disappoint. Blanchett relishes every indignity, every minor cruelty visited upon Ella, as she is slowly forced from member of the household to servant of it, unleashing a horrid, braying laugh at times that will inspire hatred in any who hear it. Helena Bonham-Carter occupies the direct opposite end of the scale as a delightfully dotty fairy godmother, who briefly brightens up the movie, setting Ella on her path to true love and then disappearing completely. The rest of the cast do what they can, although a supposedly comic turn by Rob Brydon falls completely flat.

Everything is pretty enough to look

at, if not scaling any new artistic heights, but the whole enterprise just invites the question: why? Who is the film aimed at? Adults will most likely find the tale far too straightforward to find much to enjoy and what elements of good natured humour are to be found are far too spread out; very young children will most likely find themselves impatiently awaiting the next appearance of the mice or "Mr Goose" while one misery after another is heaped upon Ella. Perhaps it could be aimed at 'tweens' or slightly younger, who haven't seen the originals and may find something to enjoy in here?

Branagh's fashioned a curiously oldfashioned fairy tale that ends up being pretty to look at but somewhat forgettable.

The main feature is also accompanied by animated short Frozen Fever, starring Anna, Elsa and the rest of the cast from the blockbuster smash Frozen. Focusing on the event of Anna's birthday, the first that Elsa's shared properly with Anna since recovering from her chronic fear of herself, it's a slight excuse for a few songs, the addition of some cute new mini-snowmen to the roster, and a gag or two but not much happens and it's eminently missable.

IAIN MCNALLY





SEVENTH SON

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: SERGEY BODROV / SCREENPLAY: CHARLES LEAVITT, STEVEN KNIGHT / STARRING: JULIANNE MOORE, JEFF BRIDGES, BEN BARNES, ALICIA VIKANDER, DJIMON HOUNSOU, OLIVIA WILLIAMS, ANTJE TRAUE / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 27TH

In a strange medieval world where witches can turn into dreadlocked dragons, (not a spoiler, it happens in the film's early moments) and are kept in check by "Spooks" - an order of seventh sons of seventh sons, supposedly gifted with great strength and an almost scientific method of combating magic - the one thing that's the most hard to believe is that anyone can understand Jeff Bridges' Gregory when he speaks! Bridges riffs his Rooster Cockburn character from True Grit but with a codenglish accent, growling and snarling his lines as if his mouth were filled with a whole quarry of pebbles.

Forced to find a new apprentice by the reappearance of Julianne Moore's Mother Malkin, Queen of the witches, Gregory seeks out and buys Ben Barnes' Tom Ward from his supposedly loving family and sets about preparing him to assist in confronting Malkin. Gregory needs the help as the Blood Moon is rapidly approaching, when her powers will be at their peak and she will wreak terrible vengeance on mankind for the persecution of her people. Along the way, young Tom will need to learn about the world of witches, "ghasts" and the appropriate herb or potion to combat them, encounter a young half-witch and decide for himself if the only good witch is a dead witch.

The weird introduction of a hint of slavery into this fantasy story and its subsequent avoidance is only one of the many puzzling decisions made by the filmmakers. Bridges' accent is another, no one else talks like him in the film, and the actual "science" used in combating witches, which seems to mostly consist of throwing silver at them, which could have been an interesting hook for the film, remains underdeveloped. Tom learns the ropes of being a "Spook" somewhat reluctantly, despite yearning for adventure at the tale's beginning, and it's only after an encounter with a CGI Boggart that he has an unearned change of heart to embrace his destiny. Gregory, too, prefers to capture not kill his quarry right up until the moment he decides that he now prefers to kill.

While the film takes its inspiration from Joseph Delaney's The Spook's Apprentice book, a cursory glance at the book's Wikipedia page reveals that much has been altered, including changing one of Malkin's henchmen into a *slightly* comedic sidekick of the Spook for no real purpose except to show that some monsters are okay, except for the ones that aren't?

You can understand why the filmmakers changed the title too, as while the honorific of "Spook" may work on the printed page, it becomes somewhat ridiculous once uttered a few dozen times by the cast.

The film also features hugely distracting production designs with a mishmash of cultures and styles thrown into the mix intentionally (according to production designer Dante Ferretti) but it comes off as looking like someone just randomly raided the costume closet. This visually off-putting smorgasbord also applies to the locations, with the Spook's house in lush wooded lakeland apparently only a bell's peal from a

walled city in a desert landscape that looks like something straight out of John Carter.

Bridges and Moore have some fun in their roles, Moore slinking about in a succession of taloned, spined evening wear, but an almost complete lack of much-needed humour prevents the audience having the same enjoyment, although God of War fans may get a kick out of seeing Djimon Hounsou throwing around a set of chained blades similar to Kratos' signature weaponry.

IAIN MCNALLY





CHAPPiE

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NEILL BLOMKAMP / SCREENPLAY: NEILL BLOMKAMP, TERRI TATCHELL / STARRING: SHARLTO COPLEY, DEV PATEL, HUGH JACKMAN, NINJA, ¥0-LANDI VISSER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After a detour to Los Angeles 2154 for Elysium, Neill Blomkamp returns to his native Johannesburg to tell the story of Die Antwoord, a South African band of rappers/criminals who manage to get their hands on a sentient robot, in order to pull off a heist and save themselves from a local gang lord. Seriously, the South African rap-rave group members NINJA and ¥O-LANDI, playing versions of their own on-stage personas, are on-screen as much, if not more, than the titular CHAPPIE, who gains sentience through a slightly contrived series of circumstances.

Once CHAPPIE does gain sentience, he starts to learn about the world around him, and soon becomes torn between the criminal aspirations of his "daddy", NINJA, the more nurturing inclinations of his "mummy", ¥O-LANDI, and the dreams of his absentee maker, Deon (Dev Patel). Time is short, though, as NINJA & ¥O-LANDI have a tight deadline to pay off a serious debt and one of Deon's obsessed colleagues, Vincent Moore (Hugh Jackman), has been sniffing around. If word about CHAPPIE gets out, it will cause problems for everyone.

Needless to say, a clash does occur in the third act, and the action scenes are some of the best scenes in the film, Blomkamp having lost none of his skill staging action, but these are joined by enjoyable scenes of CHAPPIE learning, mimicking NINJA's rap gangster mannerisms while acting more like a child around ¥O-LANDI. Apparently, Sharlto Copley performed the title role in the same manner Andy Serkis did for Gollum in The Lord of the Rings, acting on-set with the other actors and then being digitally painted over later, and the work here is seamless.

The real star of the show, though, is NINJA. Despite his cartoonish appearance and gangster attitude, he has some of the most difficult parts of the film, incurring the audience's loathing for tricking CHAPPiE into doing things he clearly doesn't want to, even abusing him sometimes, but then managing to inspire sympathy later in the film.

Once the focus moves beyond the central trinity, things get a bit more troublesome. Hugh Jackman's Vincent Moore is a cartoonish psychopath from the off, lurking menacingly in his office cubicle in his short shorts with a gun at his side. Sigourney Weaver's role has gained much attention thanks to Blomkamp's recently announced Alien movie, but she gets very little to do here, easily manipulating Patel's Deon only to be just as easily manipulated by Jackman later on. Considering Blomkamp's recent comments on the script and story problems with Elysium, it's strange that similar criticisms can be levelled here. There's no real examination of what AI really is - Deon just creates it after a particularly long Red Bull-fuelled coding session - and the circumstances that lead to CHAPPiE's creation rely on a number of coincidences that feel manufactured.

When the film hits its stride these issues fall away and those heartfelt and touching moments are contrasted nicely with the massive ultra-violence once Moore's remote-piloted weapon platform is released. "The Moose" is Moore's obsession, a distant cousin to Robocop's ED-209 and one that has all the kinks worked out – like how to handle stairs (answer: fly!)

Near the end, the film takes a hard right turn narratively, delving into a very quick examination of the nature of consciousness before heading off into what could be a prelude to the singularity. It's unexpected, but doesn't feel out of place in this wildly uneven yet enjoyable film.

Blomkamp still hasn't quite reached the heights he scaled in his first film District 9, but CHAPPiE quite happily sits alongside it and shows he is still a director with a very unique visual sense. Perhaps the next Alien film will prove to be his masterpiece.

Take one point off the rating if major plot points built around coincidences annoy you, and another if you had trouble understanding the South African accents in District 9.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED +++++++ 9
ACTUAL +++++++ 8



THE VOICES

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MARJANE SATRAPI / SCREENPLAY: MICHAEL R. PERRY / STARRING: RYAN REYNOLDS, GEMMA ARTERTON, ANNA KENDRICK, JACKI WEAVER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In its simplest form, The Voices is a black comedy centred on Jerry (Reynolds), a happy-go-lucky factory worker who happens to have conversations with his evil cat and his far-less-sinister, docile dog. When a date with a co-worker doesn't go to plan, things take a murderous turn and the darker side of Jerry starts to come to the fore as he struggles with his past and with holding back his bleak thoughts.

Despite starting with quite the humourous edge, the more sinister side of the film begins to become more prominent as the bodies (or heads even) start to mount up. With his cat essentially the devil on one shoulder and his dog an angel on the other shoulder, poor Jerry's journey suffers a huge switch in tone as he struggles with the situation he finds himself in.

Satrapi's film is most certainly surreal, with almost a sense of Don Coscarelli's Bubba Ho-Tep or John Dies at the End to it and with moments that wouldn't feel out of place in something like Flight of the Conchords or Eagle vs. Shark when it comes to the character of Jerry. Then there's a darker element at play with a twisted Doctor Dolittle or even Norman Bates vibe to it. And throughout The Voices' duration, Jerry still maintains an almost innocence and naivety.

There are some fine supporting turns here, if not sometimes a little tongue-in-cheek, but it's most certainly Ryan Reynolds' film. Regardless of what actions are going on, you almost still can't help but feel sorry for Jerry, and Reynolds

is truly brilliant in how he delivers the character. As well as Jerry, Reynolds also lends his vocals to Mr. Whiskers (his cat) and Bosco (his dog), not to mention a few other characters that only add further to the psyche of the troubled central character of The Voices.

This is a film that sometimes may feel like its struggling to get settled into what it's really looking to achieve, although that could well be by design as it does add a frantic, impulsive edge to the film much in the way that its protagonist struggles to find peace.

The Voices is a film that most definitely flips its tone at a moment's notice; at times it can be simply brutal and

even quite gory, yet there are also plenty of genuinely funny moments that will bring a chuckle to the most downbeat of faces. And as such, because of the more humourous moments, this only makes the darker moments more impactful and hard hitting, particularly when we get to take a glimpse into Jerry's tragic backstory. All of this is even further added to by an expertly-picked soundtrack that is subtle yet manages to intertwine beautifully with the on-screen happenings.

ANDREW POLLARD

ACTUAL +++++++ 7





THE LATEST HOME VIDEO RELEASES REVIEW S

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 1

DVD & BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: FRANCIS LAWRENCE / SCREENPLAY: PETER CRAIG, DANNY STRONG / STARRING: JENNIFER LAWRENCE, JOSH HUTCHERSON, LIAM HEMSWORTH, WOODY HARRELSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The games are over...

Katniss Everdeen (Lawrence) teeters on the brink of a nervous breakdown, struggling to process the horrors from two arena visits. Her fellow District 12 refugees, fleeing from the Capitol's destructive retribution, are struggling to integrate into the military austerity of their new home in District 13. Peeta (Hutcherson) is missing. With war on a fast-approaching horizon, two presidents plot their next move and, unavoidably, Katniss will be at the forefront of a conflict to be fought in the mind as much as on the battlefield. She must become the Mockingiay.

Suzanne Collins' third and final novel was always going to be the most problematic to adapt. Perhaps the least popular of the trilogy, splitting the book into two films does make a certain amount of sense given the numerous plotlines. The difficulty in doing so presents an issue, however; the first half of Mockingjay the book is a pretty bleak affair. With scenes of executions and oppression, wanton murder and mass graves littering the opening act, this is no bedtime story and it takes a little time to pick up some momentum.

One of the strengths of The Hunger Games series, though, is the advantage it has over its rivals in the YA, dystopian future, market. With a more interesting, if not entirely original, central premise and strong, relatable lead characters, this is a

franchise that has grown in confidence, comfortable in pushing boundaries and challenging audiences. With no more arena adventures, and as the world of Pan Em grows increasingly unstable, there is a distinct tonal shift in Mockingjay Part 1. Laughs have always been scarce when dealing with a society that sends children to kill children but here, there is a more, well, grown up feeling to everything. Familiar YA themes of identity and responsibility are still present but there is a darker, more serious atmosphere building in the depths of the bunker that is District 13. Propaganda and manipulation, fear and hope are to the fore. Not only must Katniss deal with the haunting presence of the malevolent President Snow (Donald Sutherland) stalking her, she now faces the added reality of having to satisfy the murky motives of President Coin (Julianne Moore), leader of District 13 and architect of the revolution.

One side effect of splitting the novel is that familiar characters from the first two films can become a little marginalised as some scenes are either extended or added. Haymitch (Harrelson) and Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman) are here but in much smaller roles. Coin and Snow dominate screen time but even more so than in previous films, this is Katniss' story. Lawrence as always is an engaging presence and the emotional demands of her character in Mockingjay Part 1 certainly

give her plenty to get her teeth into. As much a victim of circumstance as a hero to the rebellion, Katniss is a complex, at times even unlikeable character, but Lawrence brings a vulnerability and reluctant strength to a role that could easily have become clichéd.

Mockingjay Part 1 will not satisfy everyone. With less action and a strong focus on political manoeuvring, this is a more adult film. Fans of the series and the books will be patient, knowing that much is to come in Part 2, but casual audiences could grow frustrated with the meandering and slightly episodic narrative. As a precursor to the final instalment, this is perhaps as good a film as it could have been. Director Francis Lawrence's subtle, fatherly style has allowed space for the characters to develop and any flaws the film contains are less his fault and more that of the extended narrative. One thing is certain; Mockingjay Part 2 will, if possible, be even more anticipated now and as such must deliver to avoid the franchise disappointing in its big finale.

...war is coming.

Extras: Featurettes / Making of... / Tribute to Philip Seymour Hoffman

JOHN TOWNSEND





PADDINGTON

DVD & BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: PAUL KING / SCREENPLAY: PAUL KING & HAMISH McCOLL / STARRING: NICOLE KIDMAN, HUGH BONNEVILLE, BEN WHISHAW, PETER CAPALDI / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

Paddington, the perennially polite permanently imperilled bear, is one of the touchstones of British pop culture. When a live-action movie was announced, the reaction was one of excitement and concern. All too often CGI versions of beloved children's characters have been brought to the silver screen, only to utterly fail as audiences can't connect with the main character.

Our movie begins in deepest darkest Peru, where we learn exactly how a species of exotic talking bear comes to learn all about English manners. Cleverly, we see Paddington and family in their natural environment and the CGI'd creatures are a cunning mix of real-looking creature and movie magic. They also look very similar to the drawings in the original children's books, and this combination sells the viewer on the existence of this most exotic of bears.

A natural disaster means that Paddington has to drop his Aunt Lucy off at the Home for Retired Bears and make his way to England. It's interesting to note that in the world of Paddington, Peru knows enough about its talking bears that it's sorted out welfare for them vet hasn't mentioned their existence to the rest of the world. This is just as well, as we'd be missing half the plot of the movie otherwise. The story is not about the bear's power of speech; modern Londoners, being the stalwart types that they are, take the existence of a talking bear with a natty red hat with their usual sense of nonchalance. Rather, it is about how a foreign stranger, in need of help, transforms the lives of a family for the better.

Part of the movie's genius is

reimagining Michael Bond's original post-war refugee allegory into a tale of UK immigration, one made especially poignant by the bear's expectations of what English life is when compared to the 'reality'. This, combined with a running gag of a Calypso band popping up every once in a while to deliver a tune that is appropriate to the plot, paints a charming picture of modern Britain whilst gently making key points about strength through diversity.

It's only a matter of time before the bear ends up with his famous blue duffle coat. Though no red wellies; the movie is based on the earlier books after all. Director Paul King really does stay very loyal to the spirit of the books, carefully balancing the sort of slapstick that only movies can provide with the orangey sweetness of the original work.

Nicole Kidman plays Millicent, a villainous archivist who, upon learning that a rare marmalade munching ursine is in London, decides that the best course of action would be to employ her taxidermy skills on the poor wee bear. Her scenerychewing evil is a little much for very small children and you can see why it's a PG rather than a U. Peter Capaldi turns in a strong performance as a small-minded, cranky old man who fears outsiders. Apart from Paddington himself (voiced by the gloriously earnest Ben Whishaw), the show is stolen by Hugh Bonneville, who gets Mister Brown spot on, mixing in fatherly concern with conservative values to produce someone who desperately needs a small furry friend to make them enjoy life.

The DVD comes with a handful of extras - no commentary (which is a pity)

and a small number of documentary pieces that don't really give you an insight into the movie besides making it clear that everyone involved had fun.

Paddington is a solid piece of family entertainment. Adults will be drawn in by the storytelling, clever directing and magical realism. Kids will find it hilarious every time the fuzzy fiend causes anarchy. This is a movie made with a great deal of love, and unless you have a heart of stone, you'll love it as well.

Extras: Three featurettes / Gallery

ED FORTUNE

++++++++10







EXTRATERRESTRIAL

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: COLIN MINIHAN / SCREENPLAY: COLIN MINIHAN, STUART ORTIZ / STARRING: BRITTANY ALLEN, FREDDIE STROMA, MELANIE PAPALIA, JESSE MOSS, GIL BELLOWS, MICHAEL IRONSIDE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Send a group of youngsters to a cabin in the woods and assault them with aliens. That is Extraterrestrial in a nutshell. Yes, the kids are annoying but you'd think aliens, who have travelled goodness knows how many light-years, would have better and more important things to do.

There is a backstory to these events. Sheriff Murphy's

(Bellows) girlfriend suddenly disappeared 10 years earlier, and he warns the young folk that there have been recent 'disturbances' in the area. One such disturbance is a mutilated pig, and later their neighbour, a cannabis farming, ex-Vietnam veteran (Ironside), tells them that "I've seen some shit". He's called Travis - no doubt a nod to the famous abductee Travis

Walton - and the shit he has seen includes secret aircraft operating in the vicinity, but could easily include this film.

Travis helpfully tells us that ever since the Roswell flying saucer crash in 1947, the government has had a treaty with the aliens that allows them to abduct people. Fair enough, but the aliens are blundering idiots. Their wonderful flying saucers can't cope with our storms, and yet another bites the dust just near the youngsters' cabin.

The aliens are particularly inept at abducting people in this film, even though they have got hundreds "up there". They knock down trees, short-out electrical systems, mutilate animals, lurk in the shadows, attack at random, and unsystematically scare the crap out of people. As for what they do to you when they finally have the sense to turn their tractor beam in the right direction, you don't want or care to know. I won't mention the anal probe (damn...).

A disappointing mixture of spindly aliens and UFOs copied from Close Encounters of the Third Kind, with a dash of grimy and sadistic imagery from Communion and Fire in the Sky. It also borrows greedily and indiscriminately from real-life UFO and alien abduction reports and resolutely underlines the concept that the government is in cahoots with THEM.

The final few minutes show a flicker of originality and refer back to an earlier scene when Kyle (Stroma) unsuccessfully proposes marriage to April (Allen). After all the trauma of abduction, her excuse not to accept him because "we are all alone in the universe" is convincingly proved wrong on the personal and universal level. So despite the alien abductions and animal mutilations (apparently conducted because the aliens want to know all about us couldn't they just ask?) love at least wins out.

A well made yet wasted opportunity to comment on, explore or even poke fun at the subject of alien abductions. What is left is a mildly horrifying flick.

NIGEL WATSON

++++++++ 7



A HAUNTING AT SILVER FALLS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: BRETT DONOWHO / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: ALIX ELIZABETH GITTER, ERICK AVARI, STEVE BACIC, TARA WESTWOOD, JAMES CAVLO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following her father's death, Jordan goes to live with her aunt and uncle in the supposedly haunted town of Silver Falls. Jordan's new boyfriend, a nerdy Rick Moranis lookalike called Larry, takes her to a party in the woods but they become separated when the party is busted by the police. Wandering through the trees, Jordan finds a ring in the undergrowth and puts it on without even realising what she is doing. When she returns home, the ring brings the spirits

of two murdered girls back with her. The girls want Jordan to uncover the truth about who killed them, and paranormal activity begins to build up around Jordan thick and fast; objects go missing, photographs are mysteriously rearranged, and Jordan's bedroom door starts opening and shutting of its own accord. Soon the ghosts are trying to tear the ring off Jordan's finger while she sleeps, and in her dreams Jordan's back in the woods, only to wake up in

her own bedroom with mud on her feet. And she can't remove the ring. "It's like it chose me," she tells Larry.

And then Jordan starts to see the ghosts for herself. Two twin girls, all straggly hair and black-rimmed eyes, who follow her wherever she goes.

When the ghosts lead Jordan to a bar and point out a TV news report about a man on death row who is about to be executed for the murder of the Dahl twins, she knows who the ghosts are. She also knows that the soon-to-be-executed man is innocent

A Haunting at Silver Falls is like Nancy Drew meets The Sixth Sense. It's not really a horror film, it's a ghost story for the Veronica Mars generation and, to that extent, it does its job well. Alix Elizabeth Gitter is a solid and likeable lead, James Cavlo is believable as the geek-whogets-the-girl and Steve Bacic and Tara Westwood do their best as the slightly too-young and quirky aunt and uncle, although you don't have to be a seasoned horror fan to see the twist coming from a mile off. As for the Dahl twins, although they occasionally do that overused

spinny-head thing from
The Grudge and spend a lot
of time staring at Jordan from
underneath their fringe in a
Ringu kind of way, their design
and demeanour reminded us
a lot of the dead girl from Stir
of Echoes, which isn't a bad
comparison to evoke. In fact, A
Haunting at Silver Falls could
easily be described as a sugarfree version of the first Stir of
Echoes, which is one of the
reasons we liked it.

Having said all that, Brett Donowho's direction is flat and tensionless, and although the screenplay has some nice touches – check out the haunted school bus – it can't avoid most of the usual clichés, including a horrendous moment towards the end of the film that literally made us groan. Don't think about the film after you've seen it; all the unanswered questions will make your head ache.

A Haunting at Silver Falls could have been a lot better, but as teen ghost stories go we've all seen much worse.

IAN WHITE

+++++++ 7



[REC] 4: APOCALYPSE

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JAUME BALAGUERÓ / SCREENPLAY: JAUME BALAGUERÓ, MANU DÍEZ / STARRING: MANUELA VELASCO, PACO MANZANEDO, ISMAEL FRITSCHI, HÉCTOR COLOMÉ / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In 2007 (or 2008 in our parts), a little Spanish found footage Horror called [Rec] ran frothy mouthed into cinemas... an unexpected franchise was born. At face value, directors Paco Plaza and Jaume Balagueró merely held cameras and shot zombie carnage in an apartment block. Mind you, [Rec] was far more than another throwaway first-person experience, it was a white knuckle ride, with genuine tension, gore, and one of modern horror cinema's most genuinely flummoxing and terrifying endings.

However, a series is only as good as it's ability to develop through sequels. So in 2010 came [Rec] 2, which bravely took its first-person epidemiologic frenzy into a wholly unexpected and demonic direction. This was a sequel truly worthy of

the first film and made Plaza and Balagueró's series a more original take on the zombie genre. Unfortunately, the franchise's good luck was not to last thanks to Paco Plaza's should-havebeen-excellent [Rec] 3: Genésis, which abandoned the integral story, the handheld presentation and the scares for a more gory comedy route - the results being muddled and ill-fitting. So here we are at [Rec] 4: Apocalypse and thankfully proceedings have improved again, even if the latter stages of this franchise remain severely lacking compared to the earlier films.

This film sees long-suffering reporter Angela (Velasco) rescued from the overrun apartment and waking up at sea aboard a freighter alongside some other people. Not knowing the motives of the medical crew in charge, all

soon becomes clear, as the virus finds it's way on-board, meaning the crew must band together to try and fend off the infected or, failing that, try to survive. Unlike Genésis, Apocalypse goes for the brutal, dark approach of the first films instead of the comic overtones. That being said, the handheld approach has been fully abandoned now, in this cinematically presented journey (though the odd moments of camera footage refer to the series roots). This is good and bad; good because it allows for the make-up work to stand out and for intense chase sequences to be more easily digested (pardon the pun), but bad because it means the title of the series is now irrelevant and the overall claustrophobic vibe largely lost.

Still, Apocalypse has some great moments and at least feels like it is determined to tie-up the overall narrative mythos, which has now become less a zombie film and more Jason Goes to Hell meets 28 Days Later. Which may make or break the film for some viewers. In fact, when speaking of influences, the biggest here is F.W. Murnau's Nosferatu, with the whole fear of the foreigner angle and scenes of plague-like outbreak echoing Murnau's infamous film and its boat-set sequences. Heck, one of the characters is even wearing a shirt as direct reference to this, for all you cinebuffs out there.

Yet despite the film's rather anti-climatic finale, which seems to work too hard to outdo what came before as opposed to neatly concluding, there is a lot to admire here. The film features some entertaining pandemic jolts of energy and (despite the odd iffy animated monkey) shows the series' advancement in terms of presentation. For instance, the make-up is grossly great and the Blake Neely-esque score, by Arnau Bataller, effective, even if you do keep expecting Oliver Queen (from TV series Arrow) to turn up at points!

In short, [Rec] 4: Apocalypse is not as scary as the first and second films, nor as originally constructed, but it is more sure of itself than the muddled third movie, and while the handheld aspect would have actually improved the tone and scares, if this is to be the closing chapter in the franchise it at least goes out on a relatively fun and furiously bloody note. Still, we can't help but think that years in the future, Genésis and Apocalypse will remain more like forgotten or vaguely recalled sequels to two foreign horror landmarks rather than meaty and memorable follow-ups in their own right.

Extras: Making of [Rec] 4

JACK BOTTOMLEY





NIGHTCRAWLER

DVD & BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DAN GILROY / STARRING: JAKE GYLLENHAAL, RENE RUSSO, BILL PAXTON, RIZ AHMED / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To put it right out there on front street, Nightcrawler is simply a fantastic film. Dan Gilroy's seedy tale of Los Angeles insta-journalism is a wonder to behold.

The focus of our attention is on Lou Bloom (Gyllenhaal), a desperate man who is in need of work and who has slightly loose morals. Almost accidentally, he finds himself

involved in crime journalism as a way to make a living. Before he knows it, Lou starts to make a name for himself in the field of nightcrawling; essentially competing with his peers to be first on the scene of some grisly crimes and accidents, such as fires, shootings, and straight-up murder. As Lou sets out to make himself a quick buck, his tale becomes a darker one and one

that throws up many questions on the topic of money-making and recognition getting the better of morals and good taste.

Nightcrawler is a complicated, intriguing beast that can be viewed on multiple different levels. As a piece of social commentary, it's a great way to explore the demand for sensationalist and scaremongering in the news industry. Ratings are king and some news outlets are simply focussed on drawing in viewing numbers rather than reporting factual events or showing scenes that are in good taste. And as such, Gyllenhaal's Lou begins to get involved with the news on a level where he's not so much reporting on it, more he's actively participating in it in an effort to make his venture successful and to make a name for himself.

It has to be said, the slimmed-down Jake Gyllenhaal (he lost 30 lbs for the role) is in mesmerising form here, joining his recent turns in the likes of Source Code, End of Watch, Prisoners and Enemy as making you realise that this is an actor who is one of the very best of his generation when given the right material. Additionally, Rene Russo is also in fine form as a TV news veteran who is desperate to bring in ratings in order to keep her job, and her dynamic with Gyllenhaal is a true highlight of an all-round exceptional film.

When it received its cinema release last year, Dan Gilroy's Nightcrawler received rave reviews, and the film itself is just as good on repeat viewings. Tense, atmospheric, chilling and always engaging, added to by a pulsating, frantic soundtrack, Nightcrawler is a special, often dark, film that strides over a minefield of morals and delivers many a gripping moment that will have you glued to the edge of your seat. Quite simply, Nightcrawler is a film that you must see.

ANDREW POLLARD

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HALO: NIGHTFALL

DVD & BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: SERGIO MIMICA-GEZZAN / SCREENPLAY: PAUL SCHEURING / STARRING: MIKE COLTER, STEVEN WADDINGTON, CHRISTIAN CONTRERAS, SIENNAH BUCK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The history of video games being adapted into films is one littered with disappointment. None have been received with much enthusiasm from fans or garnered any real credibility, with the original Resident Evil being the only possible exception. And yet this rich vein remains a regular source of inspiration for filmmakers and shows no sign of running dry with more than 20 productions planned for release in the next few years. It is interesting, and

perhaps understandable then, that when approaching the coveted Halo franchise Ridley Scott's company Scott Free Productions have avoided directly referencing any existing story.

Halo: Nightfall was originally a television series consisting of five 30-minute episodes originally released through the Xbox Halo channel and now available complete on DVD and Blu-ray. Set years after the events of any previous story and linked

with the upcoming release of the Halo 5: Guardians game, Nightfall follows two elite teams of soldiers as they strive to overcome inevitable, weary differences in order to prevent a biological disaster; a mission that takes them back to the remains of an ancient Halo ring. Led by gruff former Spartan Aiken (Waddington) and slick Special Forces commander Locke (Colter), this is a back-to-basics military adventure featuring hostile new alien life forms as opposed to an all-out battle with traditional foe The Covenant.

In reality, there are few Halo series references, and what there are could have been dispensed with as the central plot is a tried and tested formulaic one of survival, infighting and ultimately single-minded heroism. The result is a "film" that existing fans may find a little disappointing and one that casual viewers with little or no prior knowledge will easily understand, but will likely not be drawn to. Taken in context within the larger Halo universe context, however. Nightfall is notable as a link

between game releases. As an introduction to the character of Locke, who appears on the cover of the forthcoming Guardians, this film can be taken as an origin story of sorts; not one with the depth of a fully filled out backstory but certainly one offering some motivation for the actions of a character that may well become more prominent in subsequent games.

However you approach Nightfall, it predictably doesn't live up to any scant early promise. Everything feels far too drawn out and a running time nearer the hour mark would have proved more than sufficient. Ultimately, this film feels more like a dismissible extra to be included with a game bundle rather than a stand-alone release and as such it is difficult to know who it is really aimed at.

Extras: Behind the Scenes / Various mini featurettes / Second story extras / Poster / Art cards

JOHN TOWNSEND

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HORNS

DVD & BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ALEXANDRE AJA / SCREENPLAY: KEITH BUNIN / STARRING: DANIEL RADCLIFFE, JUNO TEMPLE, MAX MINGHELLA, DAVID MORSE, JOE ANDERSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ever woken up after a rough night, looked in the mirror, and thought "how did that happen?" So has Ig Perrish (Radcliffe), whose hangover is accompanied by a pair of horns sprouting from his head. The day gets even weirder when he realises these horns make everyone he meets lose their inhibitions and be brutally honest about what they're thinking. Not even bacon will solve this hangover, which

conveniently coincides with Perrish being under suspicion of murdering his girlfriend – but he soon works out that he can use his newfound abilities to uncover the true killer.

While you may know director Alexandre Aja for his all-out horror films – The Hills Have Eyes, Piranha 3D, Switchblade Romance – Horns takes its cues from several genres; it's a supernatural detective story

with black comedy, romance, and occasional chaotic brutality. To the credit of Aja and screenwriter Bunin, the film largely holds all these elements together, with the mystery genuinely engaging, the comedy genuinely funny (Ig's doctor stops midoperation to have sex with the nurse), and the supernatural premise building to a horrifying conclusion as Iq is increasingly corrupted by his powers. The only element lacking is the romance, due to Temple's Merrin being little more than the old Hollywood archetype of 'quirky murder victim'.

Also to be commended is Daniel Radcliffe, a diversely talented star who's now well and truly moved on from that certain boy wizard to the point that maybe we'll soon stop feeling obliged to reference Potter when reviewing his films. Radcliffe gives a layered and gripping performance; he draws us in as Ig, the heartbroken and frustrated young boy, out of his depth in a world out to get him, resorting to smoking and listening to Bowie loudly as we all do in times like this. He then shows a darker side as Ig's

discoveries bring out the anger in him and – let's just say he becomes more Slytherin than Gryffindor. See, we just had to do it again.

The supporting cast are equally fantastic – look out for Max Minghella as Ig's childhood friend-turned-lawyer, and, if it's all seeming a bit too youthful for you, David Morse is great as Merrin's grieving and angry father. To top it off, the film's chaotically stylish aesthetics fit perfectly with Ig's descent into darkness, and provide one of the trippiest drugs sequences you've seen since Hunter S. Thompson went to Vegas.

Thanks to its twisted, witty script and a perfectly pitched central performance, Horns gives us one of the more interesting takes on a certain horny creature (and we don't mean teenagers). It's a refreshingly weird film that's more than welcome in a world where it's easy for horror to stick to well-worn formulae.

Extras: The Making of Horns

KIERON MOORE





CLOWN

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JON WATTS / SCREENPLAY: JON WATTS, CHRISTOPHER D. FORD / STARRING: ANDY POWERS, ELI ROTH, PETER STORMARE, LAURA ALLEN, CHRISTIAN DISTEFANO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Writer Christopher D. Ford and director Jon Watts put together a fake Grindhouse-style trailer, claiming it a work from 'master of horror' Eli Roth. Where this might have rubbed a more egomaniacal fillmmaker up the wrong way, it left Eli impressed enough to produce a feature-length version. The end result attempts to answer once and for all just

why people are scared of clowns. Using some wonky Nordic mythology, the film proposes that the clown was originally a bogeyman-like demon that lived in the mountains and gobbled up children.

A simple set-up which sees doting father and real estate agent Kent (Powers) try and improvise a clown suit after the entertainer planned for his son's birthday party gets double booked. Coincidentally, he discovers an ominous chest in the property he's currently representing, and inside a grubby clown suit. But after the party's over, he isn't able to get the suit off, and so begins a gradual transformation into a demonic, child-hungry monster. Peter Stormare plays a Van Helsing-like character who's inhabited the clown suit before, and only he knows how to help Kent.

Like a nightmarish take on Fellini's The Clowns, the film touches on the clown as a cultural icon, but goes one step further in exploring its prevalence as a horror trope. While this was only a fleeting dissection, it's perhaps the finest clown horror this side of Stephen King's It, and while that's not much of an accolade, it manages to take one of the most worn-out phobias and make it interesting and thoroughly enjoyable.

Watts shoots the film wonderfully straight-faced, but

it's not without a twisted sense of humour, which is a tall order given the on-screen decapitation of four kids. Nevertheless, there's an almost Marx Brothers physicality to Powers' performance, which never loses sight of the fact that clowns are ultimately funny. Once in full demon mode, Eli Roth himself takes over as Frowny the Clown (he just can't help himself), a creation somewhere between Psychoville's Mr Jelly and Pumpkinhead.

Clown may be formulaic and filled up to the guts with familiar tropes, but it is tremendous fun and an effective body horror. It owes a tremendous debt to Cronenberg's The Fly, not least with the plotting and pace, but with great make-up and gore effects, a strong central performance and quality direction from Watts, Clown is definitely one worth watching.

DOMINIC CUTHRERT

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THE GRANDMASTER

DVD & BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: WONG KAR-WAI / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: TONY LEUNG CHIU-WAI, ZHANG ZIYI, CUNG LE, QINGXIANG WANG, ELVIS TSUI / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 30TH

When a film takes pleasure in its own meandering, that film is generally frowned upon as obnoxious and a waste of everyone's time - but Wong Kar-wai's Ip Man biopic The Grandmaster has too fine a flair to it for it to be judged harshly. A cinematic telling of martial artist and Wing Chun grandmaster Ip Man's life (portrayed by Tony Leung Chiu-Wai) and career as a Grandmaster, teacher and family man, the film is not without its charms, despite the sheer muddle it puts itself in.

The film is set mostly throughout the early/mid

twentieth century, between the 1930s and 1950s, and this is reflected in much of Kar-wai's ever-present stylised flavour of film-making. It gets to a point where the film looks so darn interesting, from setpieces to direction, that you almost don't notice how nearly every precious moment in The Grandmaster drags like heroine Gong Er (aka Zhang Ziyi) as she silently pulls her feet along the wooden floor in time-honoured style, ready to battle Ip Man in a test of his skill during their initial meeting.

Whether each pivotal scene having an abnormally slow pace

and editing style is to strengthen the scenes' impact or to allow audiences to dazzle in the film's immensely pretty appearance is debatable, but it's also debatable just how much of this type of film-making you're prepared to put up with.

What little story there is in The Grandmaster is executed in a scrapbook manner - bits of Ip's story here, some of Gong's backstory there, and a dash of their unrealised romance on top. It's a shame the story is handled in such a haphazard way, because it offers something genuinely interesting, then snatches it back before you can really begin to take in what occurs throughout Ip Man's life as he balances his martial arts with personal struggles. Leung Chiu-Wai carries the character with subtlety and conviction, but the snatching robs any real emotional reverence from his performance.

Throughout the film, Ip plays his part in unwittingly becoming northern China's martial arts representative against southern China, loses his family due to China's second conflict with Japan between 1937 and 1945, and has a relationship blossoming and withering back and forth with Gong Er, the daughter of southern China's elderly representative in martial arts. So much emotional

entanglement for Ip is hinted at but rarely develops, no matter how deftly crafted each scene is in its emotional resonance. That resonance is only skindeep, literally, as Kar-wai being the director that he is, places the emphasis firmly on how the film looks.

In that respect then, *The Grandmaster* is excellent. The fight scenes that occur throughout this film are all mouth-wateringly well crafted, a highpoint being Gong Er's final confrontation with the backstabbing Ma San. That one scene, set against a snow-laden backdrop within a station where a steam train gallops alongside their battle, almost feels as if it reclaims *Kill Bill*'s own snow-covered climax out of Tarantino's genre-blender hands.

But The Grandmaster isn't nearly as boisterous as Kill Bill — it's perfectly happy in chugging along at its own slow pace and feels as if it has no qualms with its muddled content. Its strength lies in its visuals, hence they are exploited to quiet enjoyment. The Grandmaster isn't the thrill ride its title may lead you to believe — if anything, it's the exact opposite of that. A mess for sure, but one that's undeniably ravishing to gawp at.

FRED McNAMARA







WOODEN CROSSES (1932)

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: RAYMOND BERNARD / SCREENPLAY: RAYMOND BERNARD, ANDRÉ LANG / STARRING: PIERRE BLANCHAR, GABRIEL GABRIO, CHARLES VANEL, RAYMOND AIMOS / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 30TH

If ever a film met the requirements for Eureka Entertainment's Masters of Cinema series, it's Raymond Bernard's seminal World War One drama Wooden Crosses (Les crox de bios). To coincide with the hundredth anniversary of the start of the 'Great War', Pathé carefully restored the film last year, and now it's

released bundled up with insightful extras.

Adapted from the novel by Roland Dorgelès, a former corporal of the 39th, Wooden Crosses sees the young and spirited student Gilbert Demachy (Pierre Blanchar) joining the French army in 1914, with a cast made up entirely of war veterans. The film starts by showing the soldier's cheer and optimism; their drinking, dancing and singing punctured by the death of a comrade, carried solemnly through their proceedings. Even as they hunker down in the trenches, there's still comradery and cheer evoking Jessie Pope's blinked propaganda poem Who's For the Game. But quickly the cheer and high spirits fade, and the nightmarish reality of their situation takes over.

The cinematography is sublime, with transitions that bleed and blend into one another, draping the film in a prolonged sense of time. Even with the ugliness of war it captures, there's also moments of beauty and introspection, particularly the magnificent shot of the sunrise over no man's land. Along with the stunning set design, Wooden Crosses remains utterly convincing, led by the powerful score, snaking its sounds with the darkening lives of the soldiers.

The conflict scenes still pack a surprising punch, depicting all the unflinching cruelty of warfare, and seeing the wounded soldiers

desperate for life is still deeply upsetting. The ending proves particularly poignant with Demachy weakly singing a song, a call back to the optimism of the soldiers at the beginning, and how it's perverted over the course of the parrative

Since its release in 1932, time has done little to dull the visceral impact of Wooden Crosses, which proves every bit as profound, touching and frightening as any contemporary offerings.

Extras: Video interview with historian Marc Ferro and film historian Laurent Veray / documentary on film restoration / Documentary - Wooden Crosses: A Sonic Adventure / archival interview with director Raymond Bernard / archival interview with Rolan Dorgelès / vintage 1914 newsreels / documentary piece on early 20th century poster artist Andrien Barrére / Documentary - The Absent Battle, The Omnipresent War / 36 page booklet.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

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EXISTS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: EDUARDO SÁNCHEZ / SCREENPLAY: JAMIE NASH / STARRING: SAMUEL DAVIS, DORA MADISON BURGE, ROGER EDWARDS, BRIAN STEELE / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 6TH

Revisiting old cinematic ground is an extremely risky undertaking. Past glories may prove impossible to recreate, resulting in a film that pales in comparison with previous work. When the most significant entry in your filmography happens to be the genre-defining Blair Witch Project, any new woodsbased found footage horror is always going to suffer harsh comparison, but with Exists, writer and director Eduardo Sánchez has almost succeeded. Almost, but not quite.

After setting out for a fun weekend filming stunts for YouTube while staying at a family member's isolated cabin, things begin to go very wrong indeed for a group of friends when they strike an unidentified childlike creature with their car and incur the wrath of a thoroughly unimpressed parent Bigfoot.

That's about all you really need to know, except to say that Exists is for the most part pretty good fun. There is a welcome sense of nostalgia to proceedings as Sánchez channels classic tropes from films such as King Kong and Frankenstein, giving the malevolent monster a relatable motive and implying the possibility of a thoughtful personality hidden somewhere beneath the angry, hairy exterior. The Bigfoot scenes are very well conceived, with extremely convincing effects and the fear emanating from the deeply annoying teens tangible.

Without doubt the best thing about Exists is that the action kicks off right from the opening scenes and keeps going at a frantic pace right through to the end. There are the usual "is there something there?" and "did he see us?" moments that populate these films but they prove not to be too annoying and quieter moments are kept to a minimum, restricting the times when the audience could question any of the on-screen action to the film's detriment.

Where Exists does sadly, and perhaps surprisingly, fall down is in the found footage concept. The set-up of filming everything to post on social media is fine, and even when they suspect there might be something hiding in the

woods, keeping the camera rolling is justifiable. When events do become a little more bloody and boisterous, though, the old complaint of "just put the camera down!" comes to the fore and there are even some occasional time-lapse external shots that could be from an entirely different cabin in the woods film altogether. Simply put, it just doesn't quite hold together.

It is notable that Exists shares little with 2014's surprisingly tense found footage release Willow Creek other than the substantially endowed paws of the antagonist. Where Bobcat Goldthwait developed a foreboding, tightly suffocating atmosphere, Sánchez has virtually created a chase movie, with the terminal teens pursued from one set piece to the next. When approached with fairly low expectations, Exists delivers a fun 90 minutes that is likely best enjoyed as a post-pub viewing experience on a Friday evening. Just don't expect to remember too much of it by Saturday morning.

JOHN TOWNSEND

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THE ABCS OF DEATH 2

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTORS: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: MARTINA GARCÍA, BÉATRICE DALLE, TRISTAN RISK, LAURENCE R. HARVEY, ANDY NYMAN / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

Of all subgenres of horror, few have as narrow margin for error as the portmanteau piece, being only as good (or bad) as their best (or worst) segment. For every V/H/S 2 there's a V/H/S: Viral, for each Little Deaths, an ABCs of Death. And, yes, we're using the latter for negative comparison here. Because, in spite of its ingenious idea and cool talent behind the lens, 2012's The ABCs of Death emerged as one of the year's worst, marred by

stupid fart jokes, unmemorable stories and a general lack of smarts. It speaks volumes that the absolute only thing this writer remembers from that movie is a scene in which a prostitute stands on a kitten until it dies.

Thankfully, the format gives the sequel ample opportunity to blaze its own path and forget about the previous film's mistakes (of which there were almost twenty six). Thankfully, like the

aforementioned V/H/S 2, this seguel is a vast improvement over its predecessor. Even more remarkable, considering how many opportunities there were for the film to fall apart, is that the good actually manages to outweigh the bad. On some occasions, it even crosses a line into genuine brilliance. It starts out strong, with the onetwo punch of E.L. Katz's clever A is for Amateur (via a quick cameo from Andy Nyman) and Julian Barratt's enjoyably silly B is for Badger and gets all the way to 'L' (your mileage may vary) before its first out-andout terrible instalment - shortly followed by the nadir of P is for P-P-P Scary. There's a few more fluffed pieces, misjudged ideas and downright confusing elements scattered about here and there, but the speed and efficiency of the delivery means that you're never far away from something more to your own tastes. Steven Kostanski's W is for Wish is a definite highlight. as is Hajime Ohata's clever O is for Ochloracy, the heartrending J is for Jesus, and Soichi Umezawa's inventive Y is for Youth.

If it's something a little

more bizarre you're after, keep an eye out for Grandad, Zygote and the chunderinducing Deloused. Phew. That's eleven out of twenty-six covered so far, and we haven't even mentioned the brain transplants, Russian roulette, desert islands, political parachutists or Soska Sisters. As a viewing experience, it's almost as exhausting to watch as it is write about. While there will be many turned off (or left indifferent) to its shock tactics and self-conscious edginess, you'll be in no danger of forgetting about The ABCs of Death 2 anytime soon.

JOEL HARLEY







THE BREAKFAST CLUB: 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (1985)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOHN HUGHES / STARRING: JUDD NELSON, MOLLY RINGWALD, EMILIO ESTEVEZ, ALLY SHEEDY, ANTHONY MICHAEL HALL, PAUL GLEASON / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 6TH

What else can really be said about the legendary John Hughes' iconic 1985 classic The Breakfast Club? It's simply a marvel of a movie that still never fails to stun to this very day.

Plot-wise, the focus is on five high school students who end up striking up an unexpected bond during a Saturday morning detention session. Ticking off various stereotypes, there's the brain (Hall), the athlete (Estevez), the basket case (Sheedy), the princess (Ringwald), and the

criminal (Nelson). As the film progresses, the narrow lines with which these characters are drawn begin to widen and you realise that they're all a lot similar in certain ways than they first thought.

A journey of teen discovery, The Breakfast Club is a film that so many have been able to relate to over the years, with each of the characters serving as some sort of entry point for nearenough everybody. It explores how everybody has quirks, bright spots and problems regardless

of the perception given to others, and it's a film that is absolutely brimming with heart, depth, humour, and also some stark, hard-hitting moments at its core.

Make no mistake about it, Hughes' film is as flawless as they come and keeps finding a new audience with each new generation who discover it. Full of memorable moments, an expertly-assigned soundtrack (Don't You Forget About Me will still have you punching the air at the film's closing credits), and dialogue (we still can't help but smile at Paul Gleason's Principle Vernon's "I'm gonna knock your dick in the dirt") that somehow manages to be totally of its time yet still relevant to this very day, this is a special, special film. But the big appeal to such a new release of an established classic is just what special features are included in the package, and this is the one slight area where this 30th anniversary edition release falls down slightly.

There are some decent extras included, although the only new additions from previous releases are the inclusion of a trailer and a trivia track. The trivia track is a brilliant inclusion for fans who love to know anything and everything about the films they watch, but we were hoping that there would maybe be some other new extras included here. Still, for fans new to these extras, they'll be sure to get a kick out of the 12-part Sincerely Yours or the breakdown of just where the whole "Brat Pack" tag came from. Also notable by his absence is Emilio Estevez, who is the only member of the film's core group, bar Paul Gleason who sadly passed away in 2006, who doesn't feature in any of the extras.

All in all, this is a superb film, an all-time classic, and an all-time favourite of many a film lover, so if you don't already own it then what are you waiting for?

Extras: Commentary with Anthony Michael Hall and Judd Nelson / Accepting the Facts: The Breakfast Club Trivia Track / Sincerely Yours / The Most Convenient Definitions: The Origins of The Brat Park / Trailer

ANDREW POLLARD







INTERVIEW - JEREMY BERG

Writer/producer/director JEREMY BERG sees his latest movie, the alien-infused THE DEVICE, released in the UK on March 23rd. The film centres on a small group who discover a strange alien sphere and then find things taking a turn for the worse. We got to speak to Jeremy about the film and his own thoughts on alien existence...

STARBURST: For those not familiar with The Device, how would you describe the film?

Jeremy Berg: Well it's a sort of horror film, an alien abduction film, but it's done very much in the style of the classic X-Files television show. A little more low-key psychological thriller. It's one of those things where you watch the film and you're supposed to question whether it's happening or not, and there are some clues along the way. And that way I had a lot of fun, as it's not such an in-your-face gore-fest, it's more like a haunted house story or a ghost story.

So where did the initial concept come from?

The concept came from a kernel of an idea I had which was basically a group of friends go out to the woods and find this object that may or may not be of earthly origin. It was a very small idea to begin with that we kind of grew into what The Device became. The reason I wanted to do something with that idea was because I thought it would be fun to explore how finding this object would change these people and change their relationships with one another. So it basically came out of that idea - an interesting place within that concept.

You've mentioned The X-Files, but were there any other films or TV shows that served as inspiration here?

A lot of the classic horror films, like Rosemary's Baby is a big inspiration for me. That film is really good at getting under your skin and being creepy even though you don't really know what's going on. I really love that film. I love The Shining and films of that nature. I love it when films create a mood, and the mood is sort of what affects you and gets under your skin more so than anything that they're showing overtly on the screen.

When people see The Device on shelves to buy, many will just see it as another alien abduction movie. That's a crammed subgenre, so what did you strive to do in order to make the film stand out from other similar films?

That's a good question. For me, I've always been interested in alien abduction stories in the real world. I find them fascinating. They're one of the only monsters that actually could be real, you know? There's something that's very frightening about alien abduction, and also frightening because in so many of the stories you're absolutely helpless; sort of with no power to resist this. There's a lot of alien abduction stories out there, and some very good ones, but what I've noticed is that it can be really difficult with a writer to be contending with that idea that you're helpless when these creatures come down and abduct you and do whatever they want with you because it takes away the characters' ability to initiate anything or to be proactive. I wanted to explore the idea of what this actually might do to these people in real life if they were in this situation. But then the device itself, the object, also gave me a way to try to make the characters proactive in their situation and not just be victims but to try to do something. Obviously, it spirals out of control and gets out of hand very quickly, but that's sort of what I wanted to do with the subject matter.

We guess it's safe to say that you're a firm believer of "the truth is out there" and that there's life on other planets?

I certainly am. I love alien abduction stories and my fascination with them is that my mother had a close encounter. She wasn't abducted or anything like that but she did see some UFOs actually landing. She has one of the more compelling stories about seeing UFOs and having one of those encounters. So I think that growing up and hearing that story led me to reading about other stories and just definitely being fascinated by that. I'm definitely a believer and that's one of the things that made doing this film really attractive to me, exploring that idea a little bit. I do think it's fascinating that this phenomenon could be real and how horrifying it is.

ANDREW POLLARD

THE DEVICE is released on DVD on March 23rd. Keep up with Jeremy's upcoming projects by visiting theoctoberpeople.net



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THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



he biggest news of the month is that Alexandre Desplat won the Academy Award for Best Original Score for his work on Wes Anderson's The Grand Budapest Hotel. Desplat was nominated for two scores in the awards this year, also being nominated for his work on The Imitation Game. Strangely, none of Desplat's genre work has ever really been nominated for an award, with the exception of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2 being up for a Grammy in 2012. We quite enjoyed his work this past year (especially the underrated Godzilla score), and we're looking especially forward to his work on Matteo Garrone film, Tale of Tales. Given that Garrone described the film in variety as: "A fantasy film with horror elements," we can't wait to hear what Desplat does for it.

Rustblade Records releases a thirtieth anniversary reissue of Claudio Simonetti's score for the Lamberto Bava gore masterwork, **Demons**, in late May. They're calling it the 'definitive release' of the soundtracks, and it's difficult to argue. In addition to vinyl and compact disc editions, there's a 'deluxe ultra-limited' version of 100 copies that comes in a tote

bag, with the vinyl, poster, CD in a tin, a bonus CD featuring a remixed soundtrack, a postcard, a reproduction Metropol ticket, a badge, an embroidered patch, and a poster autographed by Simonetti.

If nothing else, having the score in an affordable version once again will be superb, especially as it comes with bonus cuts, including the unreleased *Thrill*, and several alternate versions of *Demon* and *Killing*. The vinyl is on transparent blue, and is limited to 666 copies, and the compact disc will be readily available.

On the heels of the 2013 tour EP on Death Waltz that saw Simonetti and New Goblin record new versions of four of their classic film themes, Rustblade will release a limited-edition picture disc from Claudio Simonetti's Goblin called The Murder Collection. This picture disc has rearranged versions of such themes as Suspiria, Dawn of the Dead, Phenomena, and more, and is limited to 499 copies on 180-gram vinyl. You're likely to have all of these songs already, but it certainly looks lovely.

If you'd like to spend some ridiculous money, guitarist Jimmy Page has a

quadruple box set out this month, which has double-LP or CD versions of Page's scores for Lucifer Rising and Death Wish II. Each version comes with one disc featuring the original score, and an additional disc of bonus material, along with a booklet featuring trackby-track commentary from Page. The CDs are pretty reasonably priced, while the vinyl's a bit too rich for my blood. If you're a huge Zep fan, there was also the possibility of a limited set which featured both the compact discs and vinyl LPs, signed by Page, limited to just 109 copies, but that's long-since sold out, even at the rather extraordinary price of £400. If only you could get your hands on both scores singly, but an official and complete version of the Lucifer Rising score is really something to herald, no matter what.

While we're waiting for all the summer blockbuster scores to set their release dates and start previewing some music, it is nice to see that at least one new score's coming out soon: Disasterpeace's creepy, squelching, disturbing, and completely hypnotic music for horror film fest sensation It Follows is due out next month from Milan Records. We've heard it all, and despite dozens of listens, the music (and especially the main title theme) never stop raising the hair on the back of our neck.

Milan also put out a live album from Cliff Martinez last month, entitled Live at Film Fest Gent, and if you'd like an introduction to this composer's best works, we can't think of a better means than this compilation. It's the recording of the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra's performance from the World Soundtrack Awards back in October. For those of you who read of that performance in this column and, like us, were disappointed as to not being able to attend, pick this right up. The dynamism in this recording, and especially on More Hands from Only God Forgives, mean this should've been playing through your speakers for a month now.

There are three new labels to get your attention and dollars this month, and they're all based out of the United States. First up is Tiger Lab Vinyl, who are devoted to releasing score and soundtracks to Japanese anime – horror anime, specifically, and their first LP is Osamu Shoji's score for 1987's Wicked City. Pre-orders for that will launch in the middle of April, with a limited colourway available at this summer's San Diego Comic-Con.

Next, we have VCR Records, with their

Finally, there's the most interesting new label of the bunch, Terror Vision. The man behind the label, Ryan Graveface, isn't new to the music business, having owned and operated Graveface Records for more than a decade. Terror Vision's launch grabbed our attention for quite a few reasons: one, because Graveface has released excellent albums by his band Black Moth Super Rainbow, as well as material by Appleseed Cast and Dosh; and two, because of his manifesto-like post that declared he wanted to put out records: "[That] Varèse Sarabande [hadn't] already released on vinyl 20 years ago that you can still actively purchase on Discogs."

It also helps that Graveface has four releases lined up out of the gate: Not of this Earth by Chuck Cirino, 555 by Frankie 'Hollywood' Rodriguez, From a Whisper to a Scream (also known as The Offspring) by Jim Manzie, and the very excellent Perry Monroe score to Killing Spree. We spoke with Graveface from his home in Savannah, Georgia, in the United States about the label and his plans. When it's brought up early on in our conversation that the name of the label and shop certainly implies a certain era and aesthetic, Graveface agrees, saying it's one that he's, "Disturbingly obsessed with, and always have been." What's really interesting is that the first batch of releases is material that has never been released, and Graveface feels that goes along with his statement of intent. While he's quick to state that he owns many Death Waltz, Mondo, Waxwork, and other assorted reissues, and enjoys them, it's also that Terror Vision hopes to mine something different. "It did confuse me as to why no-one was pursuing the weird stuff that does, usually, have pretty kickass soundtracks," Graveface says. "It just didn't seem that anyone was capturing



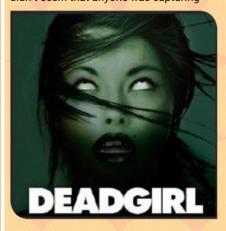
sort of what I groove to, so to speak. Like, I have a certain aesthetic, and I've always been interested in a certain type of feel from a movie and a score, and it didn't feel like anyone was tapping into that."

When asked if he's discovered a reason as to why other people might not be putting these out — like discovering that tracking down this unreleased material requires an awful lot of work, Graveface asserts that there's been some serious effort on his part, but it's also been rewarding. "With Killing Spree, for example: with Tim Ritter, it took a while for him to dig out all the tapes, and there's so much. It's not just the score. I think he sent us 16 reels of just... stuff. A ton of unreleased stuff, just so much content — it's really exciting. That's what's exciting to me: just getting to make contact."

And it's not that these things shouldn't be released, continues Graveface. He's not against the likes of a **Pet Sematary** being released, but is instead just more interested in getting in touch with independent directors and composers who are less appreciated. It just seems like it's down to aesthetics, he opines.

"Terror Vision, so far, is completely different. I have to locate the tapes. There's just something really exciting about that, instead of going through Sony or something. For me, "interesting" is shot on video, unappreciated directors – like I said on the website, what most people consider to be a shitty B-movie, I personally take offense to that, because that stuff is motivating to me. I'm a very motivated, exploratory sort of individual."

Graveface's new label, Terror Vision, is currently taking orders for its 2015 subscription service, which will get subscribers the first six releases from the label, as well as bonuses like a lathe-cut 7-inch, an exclusive t-shirt, and oh-so-many other goodies that have us drooling.







BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS
YOU THE LATEST
NEWS FROM
THE WORLD OF
GENRE LITERATURE



Sarah McIntyre Wins The Black Tentacle

The winners of Kitschie Awards for 2014 have been announced. The Kitschies are highly regarded by the publishing industry and are given annually to books that fulfil the criteria of being progressive and intelligent as well as entertaining. The Black Tentacle is awarded to those who encourage and elevate the conversation around genre literature. This time around it was given to children's book illustrator and writer Sarah McIntyre. She is noted for promoting the rights of artists in the industry and has recently announced the #Nonidentikit challenge, which encourages a more diverse range of faces in illustrated works. The Golden Tentacle for debut work went to Hermione Eyre for Viper Wine, while US author Andrew Smith won the Red Tentacle award for his Young Adult novel Grasshopper Jungle. The Inky Tentacle for cover art went to Glenn O'Neil for the book Tigerman. The Invisible Tentacle, which is awarded to natively digital fiction, went to the game Kentucky Route Zero: Act III, produced by Cardboard Computer. This is the first year that they were sponsored by Failbetter Games' award-winning browser-based adventure, Fallen London.

'Lost' SHERLOCK Story Found

A 1,300-word Sherlock Holmes short story has been discovered by Walter Elliot, a local historian based in Selkirk, Scotland. The story comes from a 48-page booklet called **The Book o' the Brig** which was published in 1903 to raise funds for a local bridge. The story features Holmes deducing Watson's travel plans. However, the story has not been attributed to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and though Doyle was an infrequent visitor to Selkirk, it seems unlikely that he wrote it. Instead, the story stands as an early example of fan fiction, which is just as interesting.

Boo Books Open Submissions Window

Derby based small press publisher Boo Books have announced a submissions window for novels, novellas and short story collections with a view to publication in late 2015 and into 2016. Boo's current output has been mostly horror and though they are a small outfit, they have a growing gathering of fans that include various literary industry professionals. Boo Books are looking for all sorts of original works, and their guidelines can be found via their website.

Nosy Crow Win Blue Peter Award

Children's publisher Nosy Crow have won the Blue Peter Best Story Award for the **The Spy Who Loved School Dinners**, written by Pamela Butchart and illustrated by Thomas Flintham. The prize was presented at the Blue Peter Book Awards 2015. The awards are voted for by schoolchildren, and are managed by the charity, the Booktrust. Other winners included Bloomsbury's **The Silly Book of Side-Splitting Stuff**, by author Andy Seed and illustrator Scott Garrett, which won Best Book with Facts.

SFWA Now Offers Membership to Self-Published and Small Press Authors

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) has announced that it will extend memberships to self-published and small press authors. Writers must be earning about \$3,000 for a novel, or a total of 10,000 words of short fiction at 6 cents a word in order to qualify. These requirements include those who make that figure via advances or through a steady income over a period of time. The SFWA has come under heavy criticism in the past for being behind the times, and hopefully this will move things forward.

Sarah Beth Durst Signs with Harper Voyager

Sarah Beth Durst's fantasy trilogy, **The Queens of Renthia**, has been signed to Harper Voyager. The series is set in a world where everything natural has a bloodthirsty and homicidal spirit. The first part of the series, **The Queen of Blood**, is set for an autumn 2016 publication. Durst is better known for books such as the young adult title **Chasing Power**, the vampire horror novel **Drink, Slay, Love** and the adult title **The Lost**.

HIS DARK MATERIALS Go Digital

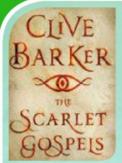
Phillip Pullman's **His Dark Materials** series is finally available as an e-book. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the publication of **Northern Lights**, and new paperback versions of the fantasy series will be released later this year. **Northern Lights** received the Carnegie medal in 1995, and was adapted into a movie called **The Golden Compass** in 2007. The movie was a commercial failure, despite featuring a polar bear punching another polar bear.

Edge Lit Announces Guests

UK based literary genre event Edge Lit has announced its guests. Genre figures in attendance include M R Carey, Sarah Pinborough, Adrian Tchaikovsky, John Connolly, Joanne Harris, Paul McAuley, Claire North, Samantha Shannon, Jenny T Colgan, Stephen Deas, Rod Duncan, Andrew Hook, Kim Lakin-Smith, Alison Littlewood, Tom Lloyd, Suzanne MacLeod, Mark Morris, Mark Charan Newton, Adam Nevill, Sophie Sparham, Justina Robson, Gav Thorpe, Angus Watson and Adele Wearing. The event will run on July 11th at The Quad in Derby.

ED FORTUNE HIGHLIGHTS NOTEWORTHY NEW TITLES

COMING SOON



THE SCARLET GOSPELS

AUTHOR: CLIVE BARKER
PUBLISHER: ST. MARTIN'S PRESS
RELEASE DATE: MAY 19TH

Clive Barker's keenly-anticipated horror novel, which will see Pinhead and the rest of the demonic Cenobites go up against occult detective Harry D'Amour. The novel promises to further explore the origins of the Cenobites themselves and will give us more information on the infamous puzzle boxes. We will also learn more about Pinhead himself (including

his proper Cenobite name). All of this will be revealed once Harry D'Amour accidentally opens a portal to hell.



GOTREK AND FELIX: SLAYER

AUTHOR: DAVID GUYMER PUBLISHER: BLACK LIBRARY RELEASE DATE: MAY 12TH

The short, spiky-haired killing machine known as Gotrek the Dwarf has been throwing himself at impossible to kill monsters since 1999. Along with his sidekick, the well-educated Felix, we've known from the very beginning of the series that Gotrek will, at some point meet some sort of gruesome and horrible end. The

tale begins with Felix having to decide if he's going to see things to the bitter end, but really the reason we'll all be buying this is to see exactly how Guymer will end this very popular series of pulp fantasy adventures. Expect blood and tears in equal measure.

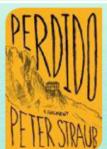


RADIANT STATE

AUTHOR: PETER HIGGINS PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ RELEASE DATE: MAY 19TH

Higgins has been crafting an evocative and action packed world with his Wolfhound Century series, filling his mythic version of twentieth century Russia with poetic violence and subtle storytelling. The story concludes with this volume, and promises to reveal the full horror of Joseph Kantor's plan for his people. What secrets do the

endless forests hold? Will fear and paranoia take hold? Will the powers of the angels and earth itself finally revolt? You will have to read the book and find out.



PERDIDO: A FRAGMENT

AUTHOR: PETER STRAUB PUBLISHER: SUBTERRANEAN PRESS RELEASE DATE: MAY 31ST

Perdido: A Fragment is literally that - a chunk of writing from one of the established masters of the art, but an unfinished one. Split into two directions, it's the story of a troubled family who have lost the joyful things in their lives. It is also the story of the isolated Norwegian resort known as Perdido, and of the filled with impossible things.

Perdido is a soft place, where reality is more of a guideline than rule. Strange and mesmerising, Perdido: A Fragment will be available only as fully cloth-bound hardcover copies



LOVE IS RED

AUTHOR: SOPHIE JAFF PUBLISHER: HARPER COLLINS RELEASE DATE: MAY 12TH

Jaff's horror debut has been likened to Lauren Beukes' The Shining Girls and Patrick Süskind's Perfume. It follows the journey of Katherine Emerson, a young lady torn between two men who may have their own dark agenda. It also tells the tale from the perspective of the Sickle Man, an ancient evil, which turns human

beings into twisted art. As Katherine's heart becomes more torn, the Sickle Man's power grows. This is a haunting tale of obsession, desire and fate.



GENE RODDENBERRY'S STAR TREK: THE ORIGINAL CAST ADVENTURES

EDITED BY: DOUGLAS BRODE AND SHEAT. BRODE PUBLISHER: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS RELEASE DATE: MAY 16TH

This book collects far-reaching and provocative essays, offering new insights into one of the most significant shows ever produced. Intended as a resource for academics, hardcore fans and those overwhelmed with nostalgia, this

collection will cover subjects as diverse as the show's religious implications, its romantic elements, and its role in the globalisation of American culture. Subjects as diverse as the Vietnam War, and Milton's Paradise Lost are considered, and it also explores the idea of William Shatner as a romantic object.



UPROOTED

AUTHOR: NAOMI NOVIK PUBLISHER: DEL REY BOOKS RELEASE DATE: MAY 19TH

We adored Novik's Temeraire novels, and Uprooted marks the start of a whole new series, inspired by the Grimm fairy tales. Uprooted is the story of Agnieszka, a woman who loves her home, right down to a malevolent wood and the local wizard known only as the Dragon. The wizard demands a

tribute of a single young woman every ten years in order to serve his needs. Everyone knows that the village beauty, Kasia, is fated to chosen. Agnieszka loves Kasia dearly, and will do everything in her power to save her friend.



ARCHANGEL

AUTHOR: MARGUERITE REED PUBLISHER: ARCHE PRESS RELEASE DATE: MAY 12TH (US)

RELEASE DATE: MAY 12TH (US), MAY 28TH (UK)

This debut novel is an environmental warning about the consequence of far space colonisation. It follows the journey of human colonists on the distant world of Ubasti, a place rich in wildlife and low in everything else. The narrative focuses on

xenobiologist Vashti Loren, one of the few colonists licensed to take rich Offworlders on expensive safaris across this strange new world. Vashti has her own problems; almost everything that could have gone wrong in her life has done so, and history seems determined to repeat itself. Expect far-future shenanigans, personal turmoil and no small amount of intrique and adventure.



INTERVIEW - SIMON KURT UNSWORTH

Simon Kurt Unsworth is writer of supernatural fiction from Manchester, England, and was nominated for a World Fantasy Award for his short story, THE CHURCH ON THE ISLAND. We sought him out to find out about his debut novel, THE DEVIL'S DETECTIVE...

STARBURST: How would you describe The Devil's Detective?

Simon Kurt Unsworth: *The Devil's Detective* is a horror novel that wears a thriller's clothes. Or possibly a thriller wearing a horror novel's clothes. It's a crime story set in Hell, and it follows Thomas Fool, an Information Man, as he tries to solve a series of increasingly brutal murders and tries to make sense of the situation in which he finds himself. It's bleak and miserable but hopefully also exciting and surprising.

Where does Fool come from? What inspired him?

When I first had the idea for *The Devil's Detective*, years ago, it was initially a very loose series of images about a policeman in Hell. At the time, he didn't have a name or character, only a role. A month or so after having the first thoughts about the book, I was watching one of those local news shows that are split into segments and only feature stories guaranteed to make your granny smile. This one was doing a piece about a castle said to be haunted by the spirit of its former jester, Tom Fool. I have no idea why, but as I watched the dramatization of what Tom Fool's ghost was said to have done (walked up behind a tourist who was looking at his portrait, if you're interested – we get the word tomfoolery from him, so he must have been some decent kind of jester before he died and became a ghost) I suddenly knew that my nameless policeman wasn't nameless any more; he was called Tom Fool.

As for the inspiration for Fool's character, it comes from everywhere, from all of the policemen and private investigators in all the books I've read and films I've watched and shows I've seen. He's also every middle management wage slave I've met (I was one myself for a long time), and his frustrations reflect, at least in part, their frustrations and some of the ones I used to have. Thomas Fool is a good man in a bad place, something I suspect most of us feel like at some point or other in our lives, and I wanted to write about how that might make him feel. Of course, most middle management wage slaves don't have to deal with demons...

Why do you think we're so obsessed with Hell and devils?

I don't know about everyone else, but I know my interest is in the way in which Hell and demons act as both threat (behave, or we are the great punishment you'll face) and, oddly a kind of promise: survive this, they seem to say, survive us and you'll be able to be proud of yourself, to know you're capable or lucky or powerful. As an author, they're also great because there's no limits to how gross, how foul,

they can be. It's liberating, because you can go as far with them as you want, and then go a few steps further. Want it to have the face of a goat and the arms of an octopus? No problem! And shall we add in the stench of dead things and then sprinkle in some maggots and some excrement? Done. Should it kill children? Puppies? Tropical fish? Sorted! They're fun, because they have no boundaries.

My other theory, for what it's worth, is that because there's no physical geography for Hell (or at least, none that we've seen or have photographs of), it means we can personalise it. My Hell is different from your Hell, which means from a story-teller's point of view it's an infinite playground. It can smell of sulphur if I want it to, or not; it's up to me.

How do you tell a murder mystery in Hell?

Carefully! The main thing was that, because this is an idiosyncratic version of Hell (no lakes of burning oil or rolling rocks up hills all day for my sufferers, oh no), I had to be really clear about how it looked and felt and smelled and functioned. I had to create the rules and make sure they were consistent, and only once I'd done that, when I was confident I understood my Hell, could I let Fool out into it and start him walking through it.

The other important part was to have a big enough cast so that there could be red herrings, so that I could try to misdirect the reader. I always knew the end of the book (it was one of the first things that popped into my head all those years ago) and how the murders would fit into that story generally, the harder work was to link everything together and make it logical and internally consistent. I think I've managed it, but I suppose only reader feedback will tell me for sure.

What is it about the darker things that appeal?

The philosophical answer to that is, I think, that it allows us to confront our fears safely; we can explore death and pain and fear and fragility and uncertainty by reading about or watching characters experience things on our behalf. When I write, particularly short stories, I tend to work through some of the greatest fears I have by putting my characters in situations where they're having to deal with things that I don't ever want to have to face. I live in constant dread that something awful will happen to my son or wife or stepdaughters and I frequently work through these and other fears in my fiction.

The short answer is, of course, is that it's fun to be scared!

Horror seems to be gaining popularity again. Why do you think that is? It never completely went away, King and Barker and Koontz have always had a healthy presence in the bookstores, and horror movies are big business. I think what's happening at the moment, though, is that more major publishers are taking chances. There's a growing understanding that horror is capable of being intelligent, that it can deal with major themes, that it can move us as well as frighten us, and I think we're seeing the result of that understanding and of that risk-taking.

What story do you wish you had written?

I wish I'd written Salem's Lot. For me, it's a perfect novel — smart, creepy, confident enough to take the time to tell the story that needs to be told and yet very human and emotionally true. It's deceptively simple, and its tone is surprisingly warm yet it never shies away from brutality or fear or killing its major characters. It's my favourite book, and it never fails to stun me when I read it.

What is your dream project?

All my projects are dream projects. I mean, I get to write books for a living, what's not to love? I'm writing the sequel to *The Devil's Detective*, then I hope to write a ghost story featuring the main character from my short story collection *Quiet Houses*, I'm writing a film called *Familia* with the actor Ian Brooker and I have short stories in my head about places and things and people and ghosts and monsters that I'll write soon. This is my dream project, simply being Simon Kurt Unsworth, the writer, having people read my stuff and like it and keep asking me to write more. Does that sound a bit hippy? So be it, because however it sounds, it's true.

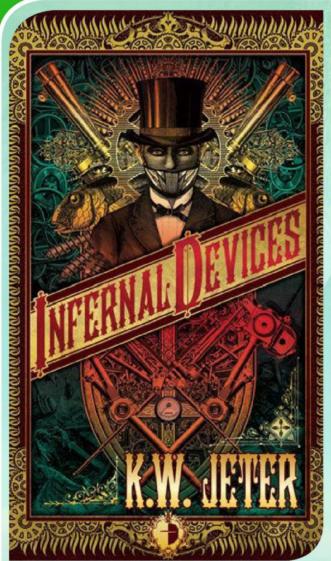
ED FORTUNE

THE DEVIL'S DETECTIVE is out now from Del Rey Books. Read our review on page 97.

BOOKS

A MONTHLY PICK OF GENRE FICTION BY KATE FATHERS

BOOK WORMHOLE



K.W. Jeter is a staple of the genre world. He's published Star Wars novels and horror fiction, sequels to Blade Runner and HG Wells' The Time Machine, and in 1987 he coined a term that most genre fans are familiar with: steampunk. That year he also published what could be called the first piece of steampunk fiction, his second novel Infernal Devices...

or those of you who don't know, steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy that features steam-powered technology and a historical or fantasy setting, usually the 19th Century or a 19th Century-influenced world. Jeter first used the term in a letter to *Locus* magazine, where he supposed that Victorian fantasy novels would be the next big thing. Since then, steampunk has gained a loyal following, backed by dozens of works of fiction, art, and cosplay.

Jeter's own contribution centres on George Dower, a wannabe watchmaker who has inherited his father's shop, and while he isn't the mechanical genius his father was, he's making do with the help of his father's old assistant, Creff. That is until a man brings an odd box in for repairs - a man who bleeds seawater and carries strange coins - and George quickly finds himself embroiled in his father's past and the dangerous future he helped create

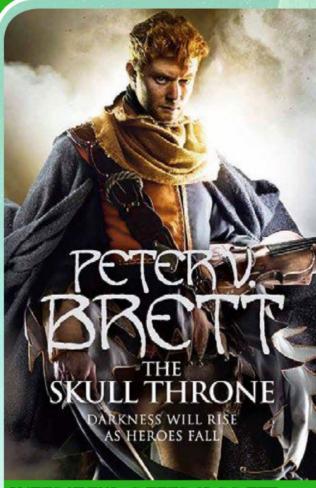
The strength of Infernal Devices is in its story. The plot itself is strong; the mysteries Jeter introduces are properly confounding and the answers are always unique and satisfying. The atmosphere of the novel is probably my favourite part. Jeter perfectly captures the Dickensian image of Victorian England, the wet cobblestone roads and dark doorways and thick-hanging fog; how at once the world seems so small and yet so vast you'll never have time to know it all.

In the middle of this is George Dower, our everyman protagonist. The success of this novel is that it roots itself in the real and familiar, and as comfortable as many readers are with the setting, this very much begins with George. He's fairly plain, a bit thick, and a tad uninspiring, but he's the lone spot of normalcy that readers can identify with and cling to amongst the supernatural aspects of the novel. His being ordinary additionally acts as a contrast to the strangeness of the other characters, as well as highlighting just how otherworldly the things he experiences are. Jeter also uses this technique to link

some of the fantastical events to real-world problems, not only causing the fantastical to feel more genuine, but bolstering the emotions of those scenes with the ones readers feel for the real-world allegories. I particularly love how he links the disappearance of a mythical creature (I won't tell you which one) to an animal's human-caused extinction. As for the other characters, the Brown Leather Man, Miss McThane, and Scape are frustrating and intriguing in turns, enlivening not only George's life but the entire book every time they appear. The novel's clockwork climax is also an enthralling read.

Where this book does fall down is with its style. Jeter reflects the 19th Century setting in his prose, much like Susanna Clarke did with Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell. Consequently, it is very formal, and written, like many Victorian novels, as an account by the protagonist. But it's not too dense, or plagued with a lot of antiquated spellings, although the style does get a bit inconsistent, losing formality as the novel progresses. There are also a number of errors in the copy - punctuation, spelling, and word placement - that might irritate the very fastidious. Regardless, the story is strong enough that any mistakes are easily overlooked, and you could say that they add authenticity to the piece. After all, George might be a terrible, terrible speller.

If you're a fan of steampunk and are interested in its beginnings, then Infernal Devices is the perfect book for you. If you're simply curious about steampunk and looking to learn more, then this is an excellent starting point. While it isn't perfect, Jeter's imagination soars off the page and that is more than enough to recommend it. Which I very much do.



INTERVIEW - PETER V. BRETT

Peter V. Brett is an American fantasy novelist best known for the DEMON CYCLE, a series of books about a formerly advanced civilisation which has been reduced to a dark age thanks to an invasion of demons. The latest part of the series, THE SKULL THRONE, is out via Harper Collins on March 24th. We caught up with Peter to find out more...

STARBURST: What can you tell us about The Skull Throne?
Peter V. Brett: It's the fourth book in the Demon Cycle series. I hate having to be at this point in the series, but for the first time it's very difficult to read this one without having read the others. You could have picked up the second one without having read the first, but by this point, the ongoing drama makes it difficult to pick up all the threads. I have put in reminders in case it's been a while since you read the last one though.

The series is set in a world where demons come out at night and have basically ravaged the land. These are magical creatures so they can't really be harmed by normal weapons, so the only way to protect yourself or anything else is to draw symbols, called wards, around them that the demons can't pass through. Sort of like holding a cross up to a vampire. Humanity has been beaten down to an almost medieval level of technology, hiding behind these magic symbols.

The series kicks off when the humans become so afraid that they don't care anymore and begin to find ways to fight back. It's a character study of different people at this pivotal point in history, showing how each of them has been scarred by an encounter with demons and it's forced them onto a new path. The demons are a big part of the story, but it's more about how

the humans overcome their fears and learn to deal with each other so they can bring humanity to place of prominence.

Why demons?

Some of it is from the formative things that I read when I was first getting into fantasy. One of the things that affected me was the *Elfstones of Shannara* by Terry Brooks. It has a similar theme; demons that are trapped in another dimension that are forcing their way back and people aren't ready to face them. That sparked my interest in demons and circles of protection. I was also in New York around the time of September 11th and what I was struck by in the days that followed was that everyone was afraid, but different people dealt with it in different ways. It was that sort of disparity that made me fascinated with an enemy that you can't fight and I thought that worked well with the idea of demons.

Why do you torture your characters so?

A good character is a tortured character. I think everyone has their own pains and struggles. Seeing someone else continue to stand fast against what their problems are gives us hope. I've said many times that my job is to create characters that people love and relate to and then torture them. It's kind of what authors do.

What's next?

The current series is set to be five books. The next book, *The Core*, will close off the storyline of all the point of view characters so far. I am then contracted for another book. That is still somewhat malleable. I have plans for another in-world book. It will be set in the town where everything started. I also have plans for another series, set in the same world but set in the future. Right now I'm working on making the last book in the series as amazing as possible.

Are we likely to see a book explaining the greater world?

I would love to do something like that. I have a file called Demon Cycle Appendix, a two-hundred page Word document that contains a glossary of every person, place and thing, including lists of locations that aren't on the map that we might get to sometime. I have so many details that I parse out to the readers when it's needed. Sometimes you'll write a long backstory for a character and then not actually need to use it. You wait for the right time for the reader to know it. To do that sort of sourcebook I think enough people will have to want to read it. I would also love to do an art book, but they are expensive to produce; you have to know if people will want it.

If you could tell your 16-year-old self one thing, what would it be?

I would not want to corrupt the timestream. Getting to the point I am now took a lot of work. Those struggles are what gave me the fortitude I have now. I think if I gave myself hints I might not get there. That said, it never hurts to tell yourself to work hard and practice more.

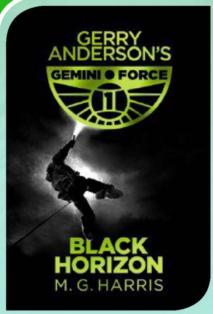
ED FORTUNE

THE SKULL THRONE is out on March 24th. Peter V. Brett can be found on twitter via @PVBrett.



THE LATEST RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



GERRY ANDERSON'S GEMINI FORCE ONE: BLACK HORIZON AUTHOR: M.G. HARRIS / PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ /

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 2ND

There's a distinct lack of Young Adult fiction that serves as a mix of action adventure and inspiration to work in the emergency services. Gerry Anderson's Gemini Force One: Black Horizon does exactly that, being a tale of a secretive international rescue agency, told from the perspective of a young boy growing into adulthood.

Gemini Force One was the brainchild of Thunderbirds creator Gerry Anderson, and he was working on the project shortly before his death in 2012. Gerry's son, Jamie, raised the cash via crowdfunding to have the project realised and Black Horizon, the first book in the series, truly feels like a classic Anderson project in the making.

The story begins with a funeral for a great and well-regarded man; the father of the main character, Ben Carrington. A freak accident leads Ben and his mother to conduct a thrilling rescue on the top of a skyscraper, and after this point the action doesn't stop. Events conspire to lead this sixteen-year-old boy to become a member of the elite Gemini Force One rescue agency. Ben is an interesting choice of protagonist; as the son of a millionaire he's hardly the typical teenager. This works quite well, making him an obvious fish-out-of-water and an easy way for the reader to access

the world of Gemini Force One.

As you might expect, this organisation not only has a hidden floating base, it also has a fleet of highly specialised rescue vehicles and an elite team of lifesaving experts. There's even a sinister bad guy and a glamorous spy. Thirty pages in and you may well be humming the Thunderbirds theme tune under your breath.

M.G. Harris is a very skilled storyteller, weaving together narrative strands into one compelling experience. Black Horizon is a fantastic thriller for adrenaline junkies of all ages. It does suffer from being the first book in the series; there's a lot of setup here and we really don't get to the main plot until half way through. Harris produces a cinematic experience throughout, keeping the reader on edge. The supporting cast is also very well portrayed, though it's clear early on that the character of Rigel is going to be the fan favourite.

Overall, Gerry Anderson's Gemini Force One: Black Horizon is a fine start to what we hope will be an ongoing and highly popular series of novels.

ED FORTUNE



DAVID WALTON

SUPERPOSITION **AUTHOR: DAVID WALTON / PUBLISHER:** PROMETHEUS BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 7TH

Quantum mechanics has been a gift to a certain sort of sci-fi storyteller for a long time now. Especially the uncertainty principle, the idea that we can't know everything about a specific particle at the same time. As frustrating as this physical law is for scientists, science fiction writers have been able to exploit this rule of the unknowable to great effect, hanging all sorts of impossible ideas on a solid scientific basis.

David Walton's Superposition goes one step further; he uses the sub-particle physics as the basis for an utterly addictive murder mystery with a fantastic twist. The story begins when an old colleague (and rather poor friend) visits our protagonist, Jacob Kelley. The guest proceeds to explain that he's discovered an intelligence lurking between the spaces of probability, and to prove his point performs a handful of impossible feats. One of these tricks involves shooting Kelley's wife, and though she is unharmed, this particular stunt triggers a whole chain of events that ends with Kelley on trial for murder. All is not what it seems as reality itself has been split into two distinct timelines, and it's a race against time as Kelley not only has to prove his innocence, but also prove the science that has caused this split in the first place.

Superposition is a compelling and carefully woven sci-fi murder mystery. The premise is solid and the science doesn't get too silly; there are elements that head into pure super-science paranormal schlock, but they're presented in such an endearingly creepy way that it's really easy to forgive.

Walton presents his tale in a very accessible way, the book dives between the up-spin and down-spin sequence of events quite easily and the reader will quickly be able to speculate exactly what's going on, which is at least half the fun. The central character is a little bit problematic; he's gullible yet pragmatic, whiny yet quite brave. This makes him difficult to empathise with and given the dualistic nature of the story, you never really get under his skin. However, the narrative is strong enough to carry this weak character and he does grow on you over time.

Overall, Superposition is a cleverly thought-out bit of sci-fi fun and it'll be interesting to see how the second (and final) book in this series complements the first. If you don't read this book, chances are that your other-dimensional doppelgänger will, and you don't want them having all the fun.





HALF WILD
AUTHOR: SALLY GREEN
PUBLISHER: PENGUIN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 26TH

Following Sally Green's breakout tale of divided witches and deadly relations, Half Wild rejoins Nathan Byrne weeks after the events of Half Bad in a very dismal situation. He's alone, hunted by witches and his sweetheart Annalise is trapped in a death-like sleep at the clutches of a terrifying witch called Mercury. To top it off, he's now developed a problematic tendency or 'gift' to transform into a bloodthirsty animal who savagely kills anything on sight.

Half Wild throttles you into Green's world just as effectively as her debut – bringing you up to speed with Nathan's plight as he clambers for positivity to counter his fading hope and animalistic bloodlust. Whereas Half Bad mostly took place in Britain, here the action unwraps like a sprawling chase across Europe – expanding the world of witches, introducing a bunch of new characters and raising the stakes for potentially greater conflicts to come.

Even as the middlechild of the trilogy, it never suffers for it. Half Wild is more confident, assured and takes bold, interesting strides in standing itself apart from the YA crowd. Green's excellently sharp writing feels tighter and more playful this time around; experimenting with typography and clearly relishing in Nathan's growing propensity for his sinister side. The gruesome bite of the original certainly isn't lost, and it's interesting to see this character. You're bound to erratically succumb to his wilder desires and fall between the blur of good and evil.

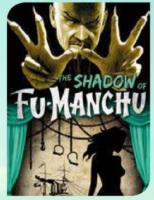
If the first book was held together by the relationship between Nathan and Annalise, the sequel is defined by Nathan's complicated friendship with Gabriel. The loyal, French witch becomes a beloved emotional crutch in the sequel, and his committed allegiance and infatuation with Nathan delivers heartbreaking

gut-punches every time they're paired together. Other characters shine brighter this time around too; with an oddly likeable serial killer in Nathan's father, Marcus, and new additions like the cocky, wind-up merchant Nesbitt who provides some welcome relief.

While the supposed 'villains' of the story feel a little sidelined, it's the teasing darkness emerging within the protagonist that proves most captivating. As the final pages twist characters into place for a potentially chaotic final instalment, you realise there's a reason you're hopelessly scraping at the walls for more. Half Wild is a viciously addictive, emotionally superior delight and the moment Sally Green's world really comes into its own.

ADAM STARKEY





THE SHADOW OF FU-MANCHU

AUTHOR: SAX ROHMER PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW The Shadow of Fu-Manchu, originally published in 1948, was one of the last novels in a series that author Sax Rohmer had begun thirty five years earlier with The Mystery of Dr Fu-Manchu. The earlier books, and their subsequent film adaptations, had stirred up a lot of controversy for their racism, misogyny and unapologetic stereotyping: the square-jawed British and American heroes were good, anyone who didn't speak English was questionable, and the yellow-skinned 'Asiatics' were almost universally bad. Even considering the times in which those early stories were written, that isn't a particularly good place to start and, in the

hands of a lesser author, the books would have deservedly disappeared into obscurity as soon as they hit the shelves, but Rohmer's stories succeed because, despite his dubious opinions about gender politics and the 'Yellow Peril' (which also should date the books very badly), they are incredibly entertaining and enormously imaginative works of adventure fiction packed with devious plots, beautiful women, thrilling escapes, terrifying torture devices and incredible technologies.

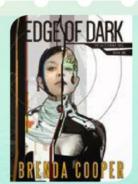
The Shadow of Fu-Manchu is no exception. If anything, because WWII and, especially, the bombing of Pearl Harbour had ironically put his earlier

books out of favour during the war years, what Rohmer gives us in this novel is a less histrionic and more three-dimensional title character with an agenda that might surprise us. Regular readers could come to this novel and still find something new to learn about the 'Devil Doctor' and new readers could open these pages without any knowledge of its predecessors and still be enthralled.

Titan are reprinting all of Rohmer's Fu-Manchu novels and it's great to see them looking so good and reading so well. Highly recommended.

IAN WHITE





EDGE OF DARK: THE GLITTERING EDGE BOOK ONE

AUTHOR: BRENDA COOPER PUBLISHER: PYR RELEASE DATE: APRIL 3RD Brenda Cooper, author of The Creative Fire and The Diamond Deep, returns with new book Edge of Dark, which tells the story of a banished group of people who have been cast off into the furthest reaches of the solar system to die. Instead of dying, they thrive, evolve and return to the sun to wage war on those who threw them aside.

The book is split up into three, with narration by Nona Hall, a privileged child of power from The Diamond Deep; Charlie Windar, a ranger exploring his home planet; and Chrystal, Nona's best friend who has awakened in a robot body. All three

characters eventually come together and dividing the novel up into sections is a great device for setting up each part of the world but unfortunately the world is never fully explored in depth.

While there are characters who are supposed to have no feeling and no emotion, it feels like all the characters speak in the same tone and voice with no emotion at all. Nothing feels different and it is hard to tell who is the lifeless A.I. from across the galaxy and who is the human with flesh, blood and vitality.

The book plays with some interesting ideas, most notably artificial intelligence, but it

never explores these themes fully, instead being bogged down by dialogue and long explanations of motivations.

Edge of Dark assumes familiarity with Cooper's previous books, so new readers will most likely be put off, but fans will most likely enjoy a return journey into Cooper's sprawling sci-fi world. Edge of Dark is an intriguing concept but ultimately it is a confusing book that contradicts itself and is really only for fans of Cooper's previous work.

RYAN POLLARD



ELEMENTARY: THE GHOST LINE

AUTHOR: ADAM CHRISTOPHER PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Good news for any fans who may be jonesing for their weekly Elementary fix, Titan Books have employed the services of their own consulting writer, Adam Christopher, to pen the first in a series of tie-in novels. Based on this one, we hope they retain his services for a long while to come. Failing that, we hope there's a secret stash of new ones that they release shortly after this one hits shelves.

The premise of the novel (Sherlock Holmes and his partner Watson going down into the dark and dank Victorian tunnels beneath the city to investigate a crime) is one that fits the classic Holmes iconography down to a tee. So much so that we deliberately

didn't specify which Watson it was. Set somewhere around the time of the first and second seasons, this book sees Holmes and Joan Watson summoned to an apartment in Hell's Kitchen to investigate a sloppy execution of a man who had Colombian connections.

We must admit that for a Sherlock Holmes story it is surprisingly easy for genresavvy readers to work out the broad strokes of the grand scheme, although this could be a result of our 'suspect everything and everyone' style of reading. Fortunately, this doesn't detract from a good tale, finely told.

For our money, the real selling point of this book is how superbly the author has captured the voices of the characters. All of the regulars sound exactly like they do in the series, but in particular Sherlock's voice has been nailed so well it's practically buried in the ground. This is where the novel really shines; like all the best tie-in fiction, it's like we're watching an episode of the TV show. If for whatever reason Christopher decides that writing novels is no longer for him, we're sure that he'd be able to get himself a job on the Elementary writing staff. But screenwriting's gain would very much be the reader's loss.

SCOTT VARNHAM





ANTI-HERO

AUTHOR: JONATHAN WOOD PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Life at MI37 is certainly never dull, and before you can say, "But didn't I save the world yesterday?" another terror is looming for Arthur Wallace and his co-workers, as they fight against the mystical, the supernatural, and the downright weird, to save humankind once again.

Anti-Hero is the latest instalment in author Jonathan Wood's Arthur Wallace series that once again sees the team at MI37 chasing unspeakable horrors, and this time it's a little too close to home as his co-workers threaten both his sanity and the world.

Our heroes, or should that be anti-heroes, are fighting one of the weirdest enemies yet, joining forces with a rather unlikely ally to save humanity and facing a few rather unusual threats along the way. It's certainly not your everyday occurrence at the office when you find yourself battling against spore zombies, psychotic computer programmes and even rather questionable gigantic mushrooms, but it's just another day at the office for the workers at MI37, and one that sees them take on their toughest challenge yet.

Making for an entertaining read, the story takes the team at MI37 to some of the toughest places yet as they make some incredibly difficult decisions to save humankind from an amusing but deadly threat that's unlike any they've ever faced before. It's a gripping story of dark humour and paranormal horror that's certainly unlike any other you've read before. This horrific story of the supernatural, complete with plenty of dark humour, is almost like the result of a rather amusing collaboration between Douglas Adams and H.P. Lovecraft (if such a thing were possible); an amusing read but with plenty of horrific notes laced throughout.

Anti-Hero makes for a gripping tale of dark comedic horror that's hard to put down, an entertainingly dark and amusing read that will certainly be tough to follow. With the next instalment in the series due out later this year, you can only wonder what horrific calamities Arthur and his coworkers will face next.

LEONA TURFORD





THE DEVIL'S DETECTIVE

AUTHOR: SIMON KURT UNSWORTH PUBLISHER: DEL REY RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Devil's Detective is the first book within a series and is Simon Kurt Unsworth's debut novel. The essential idea is that it's a noir-crime thriller set within Hell. The story follows the character Fool, who works as an 'information man', which is essentially a detective working in Hell. However, Fool doesn't have to investigate much; with Hell being the place where demons prey on humans, there is a limited place for justice. When an unusual crime takes place, however, Fool investigates.

There is much to love here. The depiction of Hell is original, with it being less of a torture chamber and more of a place for continued hard work for the unworthy, and the world building is great. It may be a

bit confusing at the start, as the immediate reaction is to think Hell will be chaos overseen by the devil. However, it is far from this, and Unsworth does a great job of showing how Hell operates within this story. The story also contains some dark elements, which thankfully aren't overused but are contained within the parameters of moving things forward.

However, although there are many characters, it would have been more appealing if the secondary ones, such as fellow information men and the bureaucratic council of devils, were further developed. This would allow for a higher degree of characterisation and would have resulted in readers caring more for the characters. The essential part of this novel is

the mystery surrounding the killings, and without enough interaction with characters, this is less mysterious and more obvious. However, it still works, assuming the development of Fool was the main priority.

Overall, it's a well written book with a decent plot. It's a dark, twisting read full of original concepts, and is suitable for anyone wanting to get into fantasy with a supernatural element. Now that the main character is developed, hopefully the focus can shift in the follow-up to fleshing out the secondary characters within the rich version of Hell Unsworth has created.

ANDREW MUSK





SARAH LOTZ is a screenwriter and novelist with a fondness for the macabre and fake names. Her latest solo novel, THE THREE, has been critically acclaimed and is out now in paperback. The follow-on, DAY FOUR, is published in hardback on May 21st. We caught up with her to find out more...

STARBURST: Why should we read The Three?

Sarah Lotz: Because it's about plane crashes and evil children, and they are two of the most interesting things in the world, I think. It starts off with four almost simultaneous plane crashes that occur across the world. There are only three survivors of the crashes, all children. It's not immediately apparent if they are suffering from PTSD or if there is something unusual about them. That's the meat of the plot.

Are The Three and Day Four connected?

The Three is a standalone novel, and Day Four is also standalone. If you read the two together, you get a complete picture of what is going on, but they can be read completely separately.

Who will enjoy The Three?

My primary intention was to entertain, certainly it's meant to be a Stephen King-style horror thriller. It's supposed to be a page turner even though it makes some points about social issues. Anyone who likes a good thriller and dabbles in horror will find it an entertaining read. Don't read it on a plane though!

Why do you think planes feature in so many horror stories?

It's down to claustrophobia. It's less about travel and more about

being trapped in an enclosed environment without being able to get away. I think that's what scares a lot of people. Same goes for travelling on a ship.

Why do children make for such great horror?

I think it's because we want to nurture children. They're gorgeous and big eyed, we want to protect them. So when there's something slightly creepy about a child it goes against our natural instincts, which is standard fare for horror movies and novels. Just look at the kids in *The Shining*, for example. I think things like *Rosemary's Baby*, where things that we really want to nurture and take care of, the idea that they could be evil just goes against everything.

Why horror?

I think it's because I grew up watching and reading horror movies. In Day Four, I was heavily influenced by watching The Poseidon Adventure as a small kid. That has stuck with me my whole life until I was able to write a book about it. I think all horror novelists have an absolute obsession with death. After all, it's going to happen to all of us. I think that's what is at the heart of almost all great horror fiction. It's looking into that mind-set, asking what is going to happen when we die. We explain it by writing about it.

Who are your favourite horror authors?

It's always been Stephen King. I've been reading him since I was eleven. When he read *The Three* and said that he liked it, that was the height of my literary aspiration. When I heard that, I just burst into tears. Also Lauren Beukes, who to my mind is the number one South African author, and Iain Banks. *The Wasp Factory* sealed my fate as far as writing is concerned.

A lot of your work seems to be under a different name with other people. Why is that?

I love collaborative writing with people, because the people that I work with are always really talented. If you're going to work with someone, always choose people who are more talented than you because it's going to upgrade your writing. I've written a series of Young Adult novels with my daughter Savannah, I've written some very hardcore horror novels with a South African writer called Louis Greenberg, he's a brilliant literary author and so we balance each other out a bit. I also write choose your own erotica with two other South African authors. I chose to collaborate on that one because I came up with the idea but I'm incapable of writing a sex scene. I had no choice but to bring in writers who are excellent at that kind of thing.

What's next for you?

I've got an S.L. Grey book coming out in June that is called *Underground* and I'm currently writing another solo horror book. I can't talk too much about it because I think if you talk too much about a book you're working on, it loses its appeal.

What are your inspirations?

I read the newspapers every day. There are always ideas out there. I watch a ton of movies. I'm also a great eavesdropper; most writers are. A snatch of a conversation can be inspirational. Everything can be.

What advice do you have to aspiring authors?

Don't give up, especially if it's what you really love. You've got to persevere and not take things personally. I've had a million bad reviews and a million knock backs. I've had some quite hard criticisms. You've got to take the good with the bad and grow a thick skin. One of the reasons I stopped going on social media is because after *The Three* was published I got some really nasty threats, mostly from Americans.

If you could only have one book, what would it be?

Persuasion by Jane Austen. I know that sounds strange given what I've said about Stephen King, but I've read it about a thousand times and could happily do so again.

ED FORTUNE

THE THREE is out now from Hodder Paperbacks. To find out more about the books of SARAH LOTZ, check out sarahlotz.com

IN PRINT AND ON AUDIO

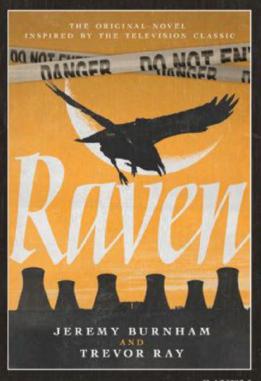
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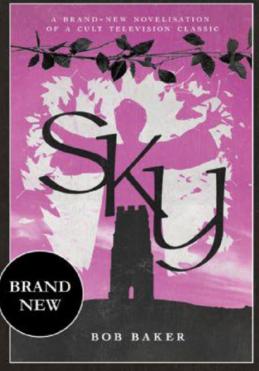
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VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



informed you last month of the impending End of all comics, as Marvel announced their end of days and totally-for-real apocalypse of all their universes. This is still ongoing as of March (what? You can't rush a good Armageddon) but now it looks as though the folks at DC have followed suit, finally scrapping the New 52 as we know it.

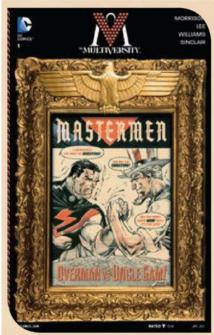
Well, so many years later, 'new' is starting to push it. You'll have seen me, in recent months, excitedly clamouring to share news of old-DC Batman, Superman and chums (Blue Beetle! Booster Gold!) re-emerging in their most familiar, pants-on-the-outside form. As a lot of us had suspected, this indeed heralds a return, of sorts, to a more familiar (fondly remembered) DC that many just aren't getting from the grimdark bastardry of recent years. The Warner Brothers movies may be running with the infamous 'no jokes' mandate, but it looks as though the editorial – comic book

- side may be realising that grim n' gritty isn't always the way forward. The good sales of their *Batgirl* line, in addition to the success of their *Flash* and *Arrow* (now a lot less Nolan-y) TV shows (not to mention how well the opposition are doing with *Ms. Marvel*) can only have buoyed this decision, which could hopefully lead to less fury and more fun. But what, specifically, can we expect from the New 52?

Pants on the outside, and the proper return of old Batman, Superman and Super-pals, right? Well, actually, not quite. While the New 52 is over, we're not returning to pre-Flashpoint continuity. "In this era of storytelling," says co-publisher Dan DiDio, "story will trump continuity as we continue to empower creators to tell the best stories in the industry." Sounds promising. The press release continues, in all caps: "NEW BOOKS, NEW CREATORS, BROADER FOCUS FOR THE DC UNIVERSE." No more caps, but more details: "Iconic Super Heroes And Super-Villains Universe Is Diversifying To Make Room For More Types Of Storytelling, More Fans." It reads like Buzzfeed clickbait, but the details are salacious. Among the titles announced, we'll see the return of such creators as Bryan Hitch, Garth Ennis, Gene Luen Yang & Ming Doyle, headlining the likes of Justice League of America, Section Eight, Superman and Constantine: The Hellblazer. There's some promising prospects there, not least the teaming of Hitman team Ennis and John McRea on Section Eight - itself a Hitman spin-off – and the return of the 'Hellblazer' title to Constantine. Now, if only they can pass it on to the TV show (if that exists now), the DC Universes will indeed be a better place to be.

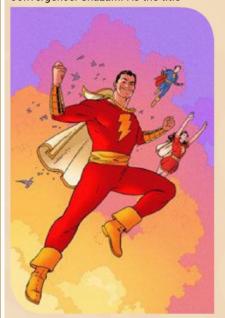
Twenty-five comics will carry on, as before, with the same numbering, while the remaining twenty-four will either be starting at #1 or re-starting as such. That gets you Black Canary, Cyborg, Doctor Fate and, um, Bat-Mite titles, in addition to mini-series such as Prez, We are Robin (there's enough of them), Harley Quinn/Power Girl and, um, Bizarro. The full press release and title lists are available online, with the New New 52 due to roll out as of June.

The old guard aren't quite gone yet, though. One of the New 52's head honchos — artist Jim Lee — can be found hard at work on Grant Morrison's Mastermen, as part of the ongoing Multiversity mash-up. This gives him a break from drawing the DCU's terrible



new costumes in order to depict a bit of Hitler on the toilet. Wait, what? So opens a story of alternate Superman, having crash-landed in 1940s Germany instead of sleepy Smallville. There he grows up to be a considerably scarier sort of villain: the sinister Overman. That adds to a long list of alternate Supermen having landed in places other than Smallville, up there with that time he landed in Russia (a Mark Millar comic, but good) and England (co-written by John Cleese, of all people, and not good). Good or bad, Masterman #1 (out now, digitally and from all good comics stores) has the distinction of opening with the sight of Adolf Hitler on the toilet reading a Superman comic, and for that, it should be commended.

The fun and games continue with the most unlikely of pairings in *Convergence: Shazam.* As the title





suggests, erstwhile Captain Marvel Billy Batson takes the lead in a story which throws Shazam headfirst into the world of cult hit *Gotham by Gaslight*. Yes, the steampunk Batman thing in which Victorian Batman tried to catch Jack the Ripper. Shazam isn't alone, either, bringing his whole family along for the fight. *Convergence: Shazam #1* is out this April. Shazam!

It may be coming to an end (it isn't, though) but you'd never know that by the ever-expanding slate of releases from Marvel. I've already mentioned his return to the DC Universe with Section Eight, but the Irishman can also be found on the other side of the fence, writing the Secret Wars miniseries Where Monsters Dwell. I know, I was hoping for more Punisher MAX too (I'd even take Punisher not-MAX or a bit more Nick Fury) but any Ennis is good Ennis (Crossed notwithstanding), and Where Monsters Dwell sounds like good fun, with biplanes fighting dinosaurs in World War I. Sold! The series is due to land this May, somehow tying in to the rest of the MU's ongoing Secret War shenanigans.

Meanwhile, one of the Cinematic Universe's most popular new characters is set to get his own-spin off series in the simple-but-effectively titled Groot. The series will by written by newcomer Jeff Loveness and illustrated by artist Brian Kesinger, telling the tale of Groot's adventures when separated from best pal Rocket Raccoon: "On an intergalactic roadtrip, calamity strikes," reads the promo material. "The two get separated and - for the first time in years, Groot's on his own!" Insert joke here about how easy Kesinger has it writing a character capable only of speaking four words (apart from the last fifteen minutes of the film, in which I totally had something in my eye, being the exception to the rule). Groot #1 is due to branch out this July.



We wind down this month's Watchtower gazing with some sadder news - namely, the unfortunate passing of not one, but two 2000 AD veterans in artists Brett Ewins and John Cooper. Ewins, of course, we'll remember for his wonderfully punky work on Judge Anderson, Judge Dredd, Rogue Trooper and Bad Company. Cooper, meanwhile, should be recognised for his work on one of Judge Dredd's best one-shot stories – that's The Guinea Pig That Changed the Law, by the way - in which Dredd shows a lesser-seen human side to forever ban animal experimentation (the Dredd Act, to you and me) with the help of a talking cat and a guinea pig named Monty. Old Dredd may be a stony-faced bastich, but in this case, he's well ahead of the curve. You know it's bad when a grumpy future fascist has a better track record in ending experiments on animals than us, in our supposedly modern society. Maybe we could do without that 'democracy' thing

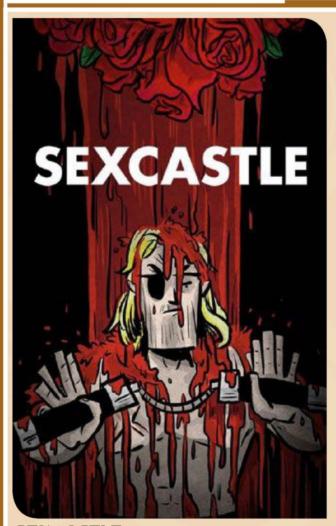
In other 2000 AD news, we see old Stoney Face having passed a milestone in his 38th anniversary, almost 40 years after his debut in Prog 2's Judge Whitey. The lawman has been through a lot since then, and – unlike the New 52 and Marvel Universe – shows no sign of going anywhere. If you haven't already, his history books are well worth picking up in The Complete Case Files or the fortnightly Mega Collection. Well worth it, not least for the free coffee cup and bookends.

And so, on a slightly bittersweet note, we close this month's View from the Watchtower. Any comics chatter, tips, news, reviewables or pictures of Hitler on the crapper can, as ever, be directed to the usual e-mail or Twitter handles.

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley

REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC **BOOK RELEASES** REVIEWED AND RATED



SEXCASTLE

WRITER: KYLE STARKS / ARTIST: KYLE STARKS / PUBLISHER: IMAGE COMICS / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 31ST

Shane Sexcastle is the toughest, meanest sonuvabitch ever to walk God's green earth. Upon his release from prison, for a totally justifiable crime, he's decided that it might be time, after a life of murder and mayhem, to try a different path. Now, if only the local thugs of the town of Bradley, past romances, grudge holding assassins, ineffectual villains and their peacocks would just leave

Sexcastle might sound like a so-bad-it's-good action flick from the 80's or 90's, but the joy of this debut graphic novel from web comic writer and artist Kyle Starks, is it's an explicit love letter to that style of filmmaking that gets all the details right whilst puncturing them with humour and adding quite a bit of genuine feeling at the same time. From the off, Sexcastle's extraordinary meanness is affirmed to a ridiculous extent over and over again, via references to his bad-ass past and extreme displays of prowess, but this is nicely contrasted with his desire





for change and, given his previous profession, his somewhat unusual new career choice. Like any retired hero who just wants a quiet life, Sexcastle is inevitably drawn back into his violent ways, but this time with hilarious results.

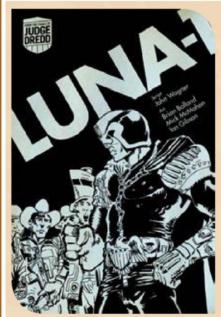
Starks clearly references the action flick oeuvre of Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Seagal etc. both thematically and visually and Sexcastle dances elegantly along the line separating paying homage to those "classics" and parodying them. He never outright mocks them, instead taking the tropes of the genre, and using them, sometimes untouched, sometimes spun on their heads, and sometimes he has Sexcastle utterly destroy them with a well-timed kick, an exquisitely timed insult or through some excellent use of vulgarity.

Starks' style is simple but full of fun details, clarity and character, with nicely choreographed action sections. Hell, even the sound effects can generate a chortle, with one character noticeably getting "Ong Bak'd" in the face. That's not to say that it's all jokes. Beneath its bloodied exterior there are plenty of heartfelt character beats and disarmingly normal touching moments.

It's no wonder that well known comics writer Matt Fraction has been heaping praise on Sexcastle; Shane may not go romping around the multiverse but he definitely shares some of his swagger and DNA with Fraction's creation Casanova Quinn.

Sexcastle is a must buy for fans of 80's action movies. If it sounds like the book might tickle your fancy even just a little bit, then it most definitely WILL do so ... and HARD ... IN THE FACE!

IAIN MCNALLY



JUDGE DREDD: LUNA 1
WRITER: JOHN WAGNER / ARTIST: VARIOUS /
PUBLISHER: REBELLION / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 9TH

There's a new sheriff in town... The International Lunar Treaty of 2061 divided a million square miles of the moon between the three cities of North America, and every six months one of the cities has to supply a new Judge-Marshall to enforce lunar law.

Step forward Judge Dredd; in this pocketsized collection of stories from the early days of 2000 AD's leading lawman, it's his turn, but there's a long line of lawbreakers ready to get in his way.

The first few stories here set up the city of Luna-1 as a Wild West-style town; the rough frontier compared to the metropolis that is Mega-City One. There's a robot gunslinger, a sinister tycoon buying up land, and a very cool moment where the new sheriff enters a saloon. Yes, of course Dredd ends up in a bar fight.

Unfortunately, this intriguing premise is forgotten about not long into the Luna-1 stories, when the tone reverts to the kinds of cases that would work better back in Dredd's normal setting of the Big Meg. One story sees a gang of evil robot cars go on the rampage, stretching out a joke about a car having the mind of a five year-old child for four whole chapters (and it's as tedious as that sounds). On the other hand, those stories with interesting premises fail to explore them fully; a cliffhanger featuring Dredd trapped out on the moon's surface is resolved within two pages of the next instalment.

Those used to the more sophisticated storytelling of recent 2000 AD epics may be disappointed; the strips here are short, simple, albeit occasionally fun tales in which a gimmicky villain pops up and Dredd soon comes up with a ploy to beat them. There's little in the way of characterisation, aside from Dredd's relationship with his mechanical assistant Walter the Wobot,

who you'll either love or hate; he comes across here as a bit too Jar Jar Binks.

The Luna-1 stories have a nice initial concept - a frontier town on the moon being a great counterpoint to the overcrowded Mega-Cities and irradiated wastelands on Earth - but squander it in favour of an inconsistent depiction of their setting and unremarkable storytelling. Especially considering their placement in the Dredd chronology near to the much-loved Cursed Earth saga (the first Dredd epic) and The Return of Rico, which added some depth to Old Stony Face, there's a good reason the Luna-1 stories haven't been remembered as well as others. With the strips in this volume also available as part of the Complete Case Files, and Dredd's adventures continuing in 2000 AD, there are better options out there to get your fix of justice.

KIERON MOORE





ROT & RUIN: WARRIOR SMART

WRITER: JONATHAN MABERRY / ARTIST: TONY VARGAS, OLIVER LEE ARCE / PUBLISHER: IDW / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 21ST

Rot & Ruin: Warrior Smart is a graphic novel set in the world of Jonathan Maberry's award-winning series of young adult novels, also called Rot & Ruin. As the name suggests, this is a post-apocalyptic world in which zombies roam free and mankind struggles to survive.

The tale sets things up quite quickly; the main characters are a team of teenagers who fancy themselves as samurai. They are surviving as scavengers in a world that has completely collapsed. Fortunately, the walking dead are easily outwitted and seemingly simple to destroy; their only threat is in vast numbers.

The characters themselves aren't terribly distinctive or interesting; they seem to have one quirk and one emotion each, and Maberry makes up for this by keeping the action quite high throughout. The plot of this story involves another set of survivors who have come up with a sinister plot to save humanity. These people, led by a cult-like leader called Farmer John, are also fairly generic. The main problem with the plot is that it's obvious from beginning to end, which hampers any attempt at tension. What could have been commentary on the inequality in society is instead just a rather loathsome B-movie plot. Zombie stories only ever really work when they're about something that isn't zombies, and though Rot & Ruin: Warrior Smart has a stab at being about something, it really doesn't go anywhere.

The various plot points are icky and unpleasant in a horror movie sort of way, but ultimately fail to have any emotional impact, despite the best efforts of the

artists. Rot & Ruin: Warrior Smart fails to engage the reader, simply by not having any interesting characters.

Tony Vargas (Temple Run) and colourist Oliver Lee Acre's work is very good, atmospheric and solid. The art style has a cartoonish quality to it that lends itself well to this story about teenagers, and the many action scenes are clear, quick and highly enjoyable. Vargas is happy to give plenty of visual cues for the reader throughout, and though the work isn't deep, it is very clean and accessible. The art works very hard at turning a lacklustre comic book script into something entertaining and almost succeeds. Sadly, almost is not enough and this is simply just another rather dull zombie story.

ED FORTUNE

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BIRTHRIGHT VOLUME 1: HOMECOMING

WRITER: JOSHUA WILLIAMSON / ARTIST: ANDREI BRESSAN, ADRIANO LUCAS / PUBLISHER: IMAGE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When the Rhodes family's youngest son disappears, they are devastated; as

the relationships fall apart, blame and accusations are pointed directly at his father, the last person to see Mikey alive before he vanished into the woods. A year later, a man claiming to be Mikey is held by police, but this can't possibly be the missing boy. He's too old, for one thing, and looks more like an extra from Conan. He's equipped like one too, with a huge array of weapons. Yet Mikey's father can recognise his son, who has quite a tale to tell, one of years spent in a fantastical land called Terrenos.

It's an interesting twist, but merely the first of many elegant turns the plot takes. This volume collects the initial five issue arc, and there's a moment at the end of the first that will make eyes widen at what is an ingenious development. Certainly, it'll have readers turning to the next page, desperate to know more and possibly pitying those who had to wait four weeks to find out what happens next. Above all, it shows the quality of the plotting; here is a story that bends and twists our expectations by beginning with the hero returning to the normal world, taking the step back through the wardrobe, coping with the aftermath of spending time in Oz.

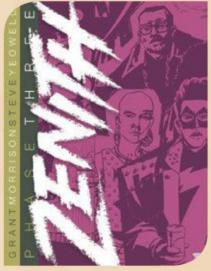
Writer Joshua Williamson brings us two adventures, the present interspersing with Mikey's arrival in Terrenos. Here we find the usual archetypes – the gruff mentor, for instance – gathered in a fantasy world of mythical beasts and a dark overlord. It's a joy to behold; Andrei Bressan's artwork is superbly imaginative, accompanied by stunning colour work from Adriano Lucas, creating a palpable atmosphere in every scene. What occurs in Terrenos is fascinating, but so too is the normal world, touching on family bonds and love, as his parents and brother find themselves tested to the limit. Again, the art and story combine to make our own world equally as thrilling, ensuring that every page is a delight.

Birthright is a wonderful tale of two very different and separate worlds, one that never falters in entertaining its readers while adding fresh ideas to the concept of destiny and what might happen when the magical adventure comes to an end.

ALISTER DAVISON

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ZENITH PHASE 3WRITER: GRANT MORRISON / ARTIST: STEVE
YEOWELL / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD GRAPHIC
NOVELS / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 9TH

The latest collection of Zenith strips from 2000 AD collects together episodes published between 1989 and 1990. In this Phase 3, the plot is stripped back to a simple but epic story: a multi-dimensional war between a vast collection of superheroes from across reality fighting a battle against the Lloigor. The Lloigor are waiting for a conjunction of worlds, an

opportunity to transcend to an even higher level of reality. The only way the heroes can save the whole of reality is to disturb the alignment at the cost of the total destruction of several worlds. This, then, is a large, morally complex story, and not something Zenith has had to face before.

The action covers a range of worlds, a set of characters too large to remember and much violence, philosophising, death, destruction and betrayal. It is also, at 144 pages, somewhat less than the sum of its parts. Where Zenith Phase 1 was brilliant, and Phase 2, though compact, took the character in a new, credible direction, this is at times a rambling soap opera of a tale without a clear narrative core.

In the main, comic strips are designed to be self-contained, entertaining and occasionally thought-provoking. Any larger narrative is kept away from the weekly bursts of adventure, peeking round the corners at appropriate times. Collected together, these stories don't work well as a single piece. There is a lot of exposition oft repeated – something needed in a strip read over many months but less satisfying when consumed over a few days.

There is too much to look at, too many characters. Like a soap opera, Zenith Phase 3 has become a set of instalments in a much-loved universe, making sense piece by piece but failing as a larger ensemble. Zenith himself gets lost in the mix, and frequently confused with a lookalike from another reality. It isn't

until the final few episodes that a story emerges, and once again it is the St John figure who is pivotal in events.

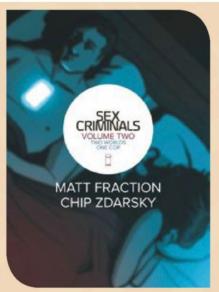
It's not all bad, and there is plenty to enjoy along the way, including a flower-power robot riding on a dinosaur – an unforgettable image. The prose is sharp and there are many moments of wit and well-observed incidents. Sadly, the central plot is flimsy, the betrayals obvious and the ending can't come soon enough. The moral dilemma of destroying worlds to save others isn't tackled head-on either, another failing.

The book ends with the light relief of a short, full-colour set of pages very much in the style of a psychedelic experience in Alice's Wonderland. It puts the rest of the book in sharp relief.

TONY JONES

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SEX CRIMINALS VOLUME 2: TWO WORLDS, ONE COP

WRITER: MATT FRACTION / ARTIST: CHIP ZDARSKY / PUBLISHER: IMAGE COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The second trade paperback in Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky's continuing Sex Criminals saga (dubbed Two Worlds, One Cop) continues to build on the funny, touching, and effortlessly perverted brand of storytelling for which they've courted acclaim and controversy alike.

Picking up with Suzie and Jon's run in with the sex police, issues #6-10 focus on the honeymoon period; the hot and heavy making way for a side of relationships that often gets overlooked. This is mirrored in the writing, too; now that some of the dick jokes and cum gags are out the way, a poignant story starts to emerge.

It's a more expansive effort than the first collection, which opens cumworld up and, inevitably, there are plenty of others with similar abilities. Where the first volume was more from Suzie's point of view, this is told more by Jon and part of the power of the narrative is how it jumps about, exploring key moments in characters' pasts and from different points of views altogether. Take Jon's beloved porn star Jasmine St. Cocaine, for example; in issue #9, we're given her origin story before she meets the dirty duo. And if the porn parody of The Wicked and the Divine doesn't leave you in stitches, we don't know what will.

The industry's leading funny men really use the comic book format to its fullest potential. There's no bullshit, it's uncompromisingly explicit with full frontal birth and plenty of examples of dick pics. It's a skewed view of American culture as seen through kink and prescriptions and crammed full of pop culture references. You haven't seen anything until you've seen Westeros' Iron Throne made out of dildos.

Like with Deadpool and, more recently,

the brilliant Unbeatable Squirrel Girl, Sex Criminals does away with the idea of person-reading-comic, with the characters addressing you directly and with a cunning self-awareness. Zdarsky's art is at all times flashy, elegant and playful. Subtle jokes tucked into the backgrounds, will leave you lingering over every panel.

If the cliffhanger leaves you wanting, the back matter might tide you over, with the fake interview with Playboy and the sex tips proving especially rib-tickling. Sex Criminals is a compelling and realistic take (despite the fantastical) on the crazy world of sex and love, nakedly honest, wonderfully odd and always frisky. Oh, and did we mentioned it's utterly filthy?

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

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RED SONJA #100 SPECIAL
WRITER: VARIOUS / ARTIST: VARIOUS /
PUBLISHER: DYNAMITE ENTERTAINMENT /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dynamite celebrates Red Sonja's milestone 100th issue by giving its readers a 48-page special collecting five

short tales featuring the flame-haired warrior. There are five covers available too, showing Sonja in various poses.

Sonja can appear to be a contradiction at times, which is perhaps her appeal; she's at once a glamour model in a chainmail bikini while also being a strong character capable of bettering those who consider themselves superior to her, be they evil sorcerers or muscle-bound barbarian types. This issue walks that line nicely, placing Sonja in situations that call for brains and brawn, both of which Sonja uses with a wit that is often as sharp as her sword. It's fair to say she's greater than the sum of her parts.

The strength of this issue is that each of the five stories offers a different take on the heroine, pitting her against a variety of foes and tricky situations, and there should be something here to please almost all readers. It's also the weakness; while none of the stories are disappointing, they're also proof that you can't please everyone all of the time. This writer's personal favourite was the first tale, a creepy and atmospheric piece that captured an aspect of Sonja extremely well, portraying the swordswoman as a sometimes lonely, isolated character. That said, all the stories succeed in showing Sonja as someone who has developed beyond perceived clichés; they can be chilling, poignant and amusing, but never at her expense. While the style of artwork varies, it remains consistently

good throughout, each artist capturing the tone of their particular story with great effect, although the body positions and curves on display may be too much for some.

It's incredibly difficult to create a successful anthology, but Dynamite can be proud of this one. Despite the ninety-nine issues that have gone before, it gives new readers a potential jumping-on point by offering an enticing glimpse into a character who is more than they bargained for, the focus of a series that is perhaps worth delving deeper into. For those who know Sonja slightly better, each story ends with a twist that will make them remember why they are so fond of her in the first place.

ALISTER DAVISON

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GRONK: A MONSTER'S STORY VOLUME TWO
WRITER & ARTIST: KATIE COOK / PUBLISHER: ACTION LAB ENTERTAINMENT /
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 31ST

Katie Cook's Gronk is a pretty simple idea. Gronk is a child-like monster who isn't very good at being scary and rather than terrifying passers-by, has moved in with a young woman called Dale to learn more about the world.
Dale is assisted
by her cat, Kitty,
and an enormous
Newfoundland
Dog called Harli,
who is a big ball of
slobber and cute.

There's something about four-panel gag strips that make it easy to evoke a sense of whimsy. Though there is a plot of sorts, this is not an exercise in complex storytelling. For example, one of the story threads is about a pug puppy on loan to Dale. This is an excuse for lots of super-cute drawings of pugs and some silly jokes involving Gronk and a tiny wrinkly dog.

Cook is fully aware that this is a road well-trodden and gleefully references the likes of Family Circus and Calvin and Hobbes throughout her work. She also throws in plenty of geek culture nods as well; Harry Potter, Ghostbusters, Lord of The Rings and so on all get some sort of name check and this adds to the silly fun. The result is a fun 'slice of life' style strip, aimed at both the young and young-at-heart.

The book is also short but sweet. Every panel is illustrated with an equal measure of adorable joy and unfettered love. This means that it is rather nice but I suspect if this book was long the reader would overload on the cuteness over time. As it is, it does the job of bringing a smile to the face of the bitterest of hearts and then stops just before it gets too much.

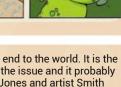
Gronk: A Monster's Story Volume Two is the kind of thing you can happily give to the most straight-laced and non-geeky of friends, safe in the knowledge that they'll find the themes of friendship and love entertaining. In the hands of geeky youngsters, however, it's pretty much

guaranteed to give them a big smile.

ED FORTUNE

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be a recipe for disaster, the folk at Madius, including writer of all three stories Rob Jones and artists Nick Gonzo, Mike Smith, Kevin Pospisil and Dan Butcher, all deliver and make the first issue of the whacky Papercuts and Inkstains a breath of fresh air in British comics.

The debut issue of the title features three tales, the first of which is titled simply No and is a straightforward manifesto short story for Madius Comics and what is to come if ever there was one. No is a tale of the soul-destroying world of work; no matter what job it is that you do, it will always be mundane, as is the case with the protagonist of the story who says "Thank God it's Friday" while working as a time adjudicator of wars in the future. It's an absurd start to the issue, and Gonzo's art balances the frantic and the mundane wonderfully, though there are some panels where it is hard to tell what is happening.

The second story, By' 'eck on Earth, features the zombie apocalypse but focused in Yorkshire. All three stories have a rather zany British humour to them, but this one especially, as Harold recounts the zombie apocalypse in such a British matter-of-fact way. Kevin Pospisil's art on this is perhaps the most stunning of the issue, looking like it was drawn and shaded in pencil, and his characters and backgrounds are exquisitely drawn.

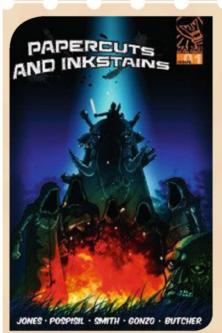
The final chapter, Profits of Doo, is the most humorous, featuring a brotherhood of bumbling druids who find that they aren't really as equipped as they thought they

were to bring an end to the world. It is the longest story of the issue and it probably deserves to be. Jones and artist Smith have done an amazing job characterising these faceless druids as bumbling idiots. It's just a really funny story.

Papercuts and Inkstains #1 is a fantastic debut issue from the folks at Madius Comics. It's a very funny title with a very unique style and it manages to sets itself apart from other humour books with a very British sense of humour and some bloody great art.

ROD MCCANCE





PAPERCUTS AND INKSTAINS #1

WRITER: ROB JONES / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: MADIUS COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Madius Comics unleash their first anthology issue Papercuts and Inkstains, which is a sci-fi, horror and comedy mish-mash. While it sounds like it might





















ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND
UP FROM THE
WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA WITH
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



Capcom Announce ATTACK ON TITAN Arcade Game

Following the critical and financial success of the brilliant **Attack on Titan,** Capcom have announced a game based on the series for Japanese arcades. There's no news on an international release, so it might mean a pilgrimage for UK fans, but you could stop off at Universal's **Attack on Titan** attraction while you're at it. At the time of going to print, there's no game footage.



Video Game GOD EATER Set for Anime Treatment

Anime is littered with series based on video games, and, good or bad, they generally make a better go of it than Hollywood. Popular franchise **God Eater** is the next in line for the series treatment. Studio Ufotable will be headlining production, with a summer release expected. Given the superior storyline, Ufotable could be on to a winner.

STUDIO GHIBLI Unsure of Next Effort

The future of the seminal animators Studio Ghibli might be ambiguous at best, but producer Toshio Suzuki assures fans that the studio is open, just not in production. Trouble is, he's not sure what to make next. Suzuki might not have anything stashed up his sleeve, but given the studio's impressive track record, we're happy to wait. We'd quite like to see a further foray into video games; after all, **Ni no Kuni** was a delight.

RWBY Creator Monty Oum Dead at 33

We were saddened to learn of the death of Rooster Teeth Studio animator and RWBY creator Monty Oum last month at the age of only 33. Following a severe allergic reaction during a routine medical procedure, Oum was quickly hospitalised and slipped into a coma from which he didn't recover, sparking an outpour of support from fans who have raised over \$200,000 for his medical care and family. Breaking into the fame machine with Haloid (a mash-up of Metroid and Halo), Oum soon began turning his hand to more extravagant efforts including Dead Fantasy, which involved Final Fantasy and Dead or Alive characters battling it out. Soon after, he landed a position with Rooster Teeth creating, writing and producing two series of the brilliant RWBY with a third in development. His co-workers asked that fans do something creative to best honour Monty. Our thoughts are with his family.





THE LATEST RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



TSURITAMA COLLECTION

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KENJI NAKAMURA / SCREENPLAY: TOSHIYA ONO / STARRING: ADAM GIBBS, CLINT BICKHAM, COREY HARTZOG, JOSH GRELLE / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

Set on the tiny offshore island of Enoshima, Tsuritama is the unlikely coming of age story of four quirky and disparate individuals fated for friendship: an alien, an awkward misfit, a fishing whizz, and an Indian secret agent with his pet duck, Tapioca.

The vibrant animation is bold and glitzy but ultimately secondary to the writing of

Toshiya Ono, who gently articulates the story around its four central characters. Newly transferred high school student Yuki Sanada is wonderfully awkward, barely able to hold eye contact or conversation without sweating profusely with his face contorting up into 'demon' expressions. His crippling gawkiness and

adolescent rage is easy to get behind; we've all been there, but seeing how his character grows over the 12-episode arc is one of the show's real strengths. It's a masterclass in pacing and giving characters enough room to develop and flourish.

Haru, an alien who can control people with water, turns up on Yuki's doorstep saving he'll be living with him and his grandmother. While continually at odds with one another. the duo soon meet Natsuki. dubbed the fishing prince and filled with his own pent-up angst. He quickly takes on the mantle of teaching Yuki and Haru how to fish with a series of painstaking exercises, like casting into buckets. DUCK agent Akira might have been charged with spying on Haru for the clandestine defensive organisation, but quickly finds himself bonding over fishing with the other three, before all four go on to save the world.

The characters are indeed testament to the quality of the writing, as Haru in particular could have wound up simply being annoying, but he's always engaging, comical and heart-warming. It's a funny and often bizarre tale, but the weirdness never overtakes character relationships and the central coming of age story. Propped up by a deliriously catchy soundtrack and heaps of feel good factor, Tsuritama is a great entry point for any anime newcomers. You'll probably learn a few things about fishing too.

Extras: Openings / Trailers

DOMINIC CUTHBERT





ghosts and gods.

Like its predecessors, there's a frenetic array of dizzying flashcards, most of which make up Koyomi's raddled inner thoughts. Given there's no English dub, the multiple sets of subtitles will have you reaching for the pause button often. But part of its charm is the swarm of information you might only ever see on a subconscious level.

The second episode is the strongest of the four and sees Shinobu spinning her history and how she came to make her first minion. She narrates over strikingly beautiful art, playing out like a manga in motion. Once the 500-year-old vampire Kiss-Shot Acerola-Orion Heart-Under-Blade, Shinobu now exists as an 8-year-old girl since losing her powers and makes for the most absorbing character of the series.

Despite the show's many

complexities and stunning aesthetic, there is a sting in the tale. Koyomi is seemingly sexually attracted to young girls, and given many of the main characters are preteens, it makes for some uncomfortable viewing, even with the odd sliver of satire that underpins it all.

This distinctly cinematic series is often dense and long-winded as its characters are largely sat around chatting, but it's these interactions which often take compelling flights of philosophical fancy. Peppered with strange humour, an ambient soundtrack and gorgeous animation, Monogatari is one to get on board with, just watch out for that perverted quasi-vampire.

Extras: TV spots / Trailer / Ending

DOMINIC CUTHBERT





MONOGATARI SERIES: 2ND SEASON

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: AKIYUKI SHINBO, TOMOYUKI ITAMURA / SCREENPLAY: AKIYUKI SHINBO, FUYASHI TOU / STARRING: HIROSHI KAMIYA, EMIRI KATOU, YUI HORIE, SHINICHIRO MIKI / RELEASE DATE:OUT NOW

This bite-sized collection gathers the four-part story arc Shinobu Time, which makes up episodes 17 to 20 of the second season of Monogatari. Based on the light novels of the same name by author and manga

scribe Nisio Isin, the series follows Koyomi Araragi, a third year high school student who survived a vampire attack, and his subsequent misadventures with several young girls involved in all manner of apparitions,

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS IN GAMING BY LEE PRICE



Lionsgate Team with Telltale

Telltale has really gone from strength to strength over the last six months. They got their hands on the **Game of Thrones** IP, their other adventure games are doing well and the company has announced that it will finally be creating its own IP soon. This month, there was another slice of good news as the developer announced that Lionsgate Studios have made a significant investment into the company.

What this means for gamers is that we will likely be seeing a whole bunch of existing Lionsgate properties get given the Telltale treatment. **Saw** would surely be a prime candidate but the company has a ton of potential titles under its belt. The investment will also go a long way to helping Telltale with that original IP development they have been harping on about.

Lionsgate CEO Jon Feltheimer commented, "Telltale is one of the premier storytellers in the gaming world today. Their leadership in narrative-driven episodic games, together with our investment and the potential opportunities created by our premium content expertise, will continue to strengthen their ability to offer exciting new avenues of storytelling to their next generation audiences across a broad range of platforms."

Interesting times indeed. This could be the precursor to Telltale really breaking out as one of the biggest developers of the current era, especially with backing from one of the bigger movie studios going today.

COMING SOON



OMEGA QUINTET PLATFORM: PS4 RELEASE DATE: MAY 1ST

If ever there was a game that is so steeped in Japanese weirdness that it is unlikely to appeal to a Western audience, it is probably Omega Quintet. Set in a world where something called 'The Beep' is affecting people's minds, Omega Quintet sounds quite interesting as an RPG. However, as you delve a little bit deeper into the proposed gameplay vou can see it is heavily reliant on costume damage for the primarily female cast in addition to the ability to create vour own dance videos with the characters. Sounds odd but could be good for a laugh.

COMING SOON



OPERATION ABYSS: NEW TOKYO LEGACY PLATFORM: VITA RELEASE DATE: APRIL 17TH

Sporting something of an old-school design philosophy, Operation Abyss is a dungeon crawler with sci-fi leanings. Taking control of the Xth Squad, the player must investigate portals that open into the titular Abyss realm in an effort to battle monsters named Variants and protect Tokyo from the horrors of this unknown world. Fans of Demon Gaze will be in familiar territory gameplay-wise, but this is a game for those who like their titles to have a slightly more Japanese flavour.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT Campaign to Cover All Six Films

Star Wars Battlefront is generating buzz in a way few Star Wars games have since the likes of the KoTOR series and the LEGO games. That interest is only going to increase after a recent report stated that the campaign mode for the game will cover events from the first six films.

Couple that with the rather exciting multiplayer announcements, which include 64-player matches and a range of battle modes, and you have a **Star Wars** game that's worth getting excited about. No release date is set just yet but it is likely we will see the title before the end of the year.

Kanye West Working on Game

Everybody's favourite Beck-hating Beyoncé lover has announced that he is working on a video game based on one of his songs. We'll let the man himself tell you what it's about: "The idea is that it's my [late] mother going through the gates of Heaven, and you've got to bring her to the highest gate of Heaven by holding her to the light."

Well that sounds well and truly horrendous but it wouldn't be at all surprising to see it get bought/ downloaded/whatever millions of times over by people who don't know what they are talking about. Just remember that Kim Kardashian's game was downloaded more than 20 million times last year.

Eww. Just eww.



Square-Enix Looking to Revive GEX and FEAR EFFECT

Square-Enix appears to be looking backwards for new games rather than investing in new IP with the announcement that they will be providing prospective developers with the ability to pitch ideas for new entries into the Gex and Fear Effect series.

Neither series has seen an entry since the 32-Bit era, though both certainly have a cult following and were pretty good games for their time. The licenses were picked up when the company bought Eidos, so in truth this isn't Square-Enix relying on its own properties this time around.

Any developers who are interested will be able to pitch an idea through the company's own 'Collective' crowdfunding service. The company is specifically looking for indie developers, so plans are clearly not huge for the new titles. Still, there will be a certain sub-section of gamers who will be very interested to see what might come out of the process. We actually have a particular fondness for the Fear Effect games, even if their gorgeous graphics and interesting plots were damaged somewhat by horrendously difficult gameplay at times.

COMING SOON



CODENAME S.T.E.A.M. PLATFORM: 3DS **RELEASE DATE: MAY 15TH**

Fans of Advance Wars rejoice! Intelligent Systems are back with a new strategy game that is set in a steampunk world. Sounds good from the off and you know the gameplay is going to be great considering who is developing. Nintendo's whole amiibo craze will be incorporated as well, so if you have any of the characters from Fire Emblem in amiibo form you should be able to scan them into the game. Look for a good blend of Advance Wars and Fire Emblem.

COMING SOON



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE **RELEASE DATE: MAY 19TH**

Based on the series of novels by Andrzej Sapkowski, the Witcher games have a solid fanbase and are definitely worth a look. The third one promises a completely new combat system and platforming mechanics that the developers claim are reminiscent of the Uncharted system. The bold claim that it is 20% larger than Skyrim is also being thrown around, all of which makes the title an interesting one to keep an eye out for. Best of all, the developers claim that players won't need to have played the first two to pick up what's happening in the third.

More ROCK BAND May Be Coming

Harmonix fans rejoice. Well, kinda. The rumour mill is turning and speculation is continuing to mount that the company are currently developing a new Rock Band game for the new generation of consoles.

While Harmonix themselves haven't come out to confirm the rumours, they have also failed to deny them and it is believed that the recent stirrings of DLC for the older Rock Band games was an attempt to gauge potential interest in a new title.

The company released a statement about the rumours: "We're excited by how enthusiastic our fans have been in regards to our most recent DLC releases, and we think it's awesome that people are speculating about the future of the franchise. While we don't have anything to announce, hundreds of thousands of unique users are still actively playing Rock Band games each month.

This passion our fans have shown for **Rock Band** over the years suggests that rock truly hasn't died, and we've always been clear that we'd love to return to the franchise when the time is right.

It's not an official confirmation just yet but the likelihood is that gamers will be strumming and banging along on their plastic instruments sooner rather than later.

Sony Erases Names of Competition Winners

What started as an excellent way to celebrate the PlayStation brand's twentieth birthday

has become something of a PR nightmare for Sony.

The company had been running a competition in Japan over the last few months wherein people who bought a PS4 or PS3 would receive a special calendar that contained a unique code. These codes were then to be entered into a draw, with the winners receiving one of the exceedingly rare PlayStation 4 Anniversary consoles.

So far so good. Plenty of sales and potential winners later it came time for the company to draw the names. A total of 123 people were picked to receive the prizes. Then Sony lost the list.

The company has issued an apology for the SNAFU, with a recent message on the Japanese site stating: "Our deepest apologies for the trouble we have caused to those who entered the previous campaign.

The company are likely to run the campaign all over again but it does seem that Sony can never quite escape their issues with keeping customer data secure.



ARKHAM KNIGHT to Have Mature Rating

It looks like the final game of the **Arkham** series is going to be a tad darker than the previous titles as recent scuttlebutt seems to indicate that the game will be receiving a higher age rating than the previous games in the series.

Rocksteady founder Sefton Hill has attributed this to the game going to even darker places than the previous titles in the series, which should be very interesting for those who like their Dark Knight to be as brooding as possible.

Sefton commented on the slightly new direction, claiming, "As [it's] the end of the trilogy, we have every villain in Gotham working together to destroy Batman. It's unavoidable that some bad stuff is going to happen. But that doesn't mean we changed our approach. We're not including gratuitous blood or swearing. We want to deliver a true end with no compromises, and it takes us to some dark places."

So it looks like it's something of a natural evolution for the series rather than an attempt to appeal to people with bloodlust. Not a bad thing at all and it should hopefully take away any creative shackles that keeping to a more universal rating would have imposed.

COMING SOON



SPACE HULK: DEATHWING PLATFORM: PS3, VITA RELEASE DATE: MAY 29TH

Those of an older gaming generation may remember the Space Hulk titles, which consisted of tactical games and an FPS back in the early to mid-'90s. Not exactly the sort of property that is particularly ripe for a reboot. Still, with Warhammer credentials behind it and weird shark-headed enemies, the game will certainly have something going for it. This latest outing will be a real-time strategy game that will appeal to fans of the original Warhammer lore. Already available on PC and Mac, the title will finally be coming to consoles but it may not be one for people who aren't already fans.

COMING SOON



SPLATOON PLATFORM: WII U RELEASE DATE: MAY 2015

Splatoon is set to be one of the more interesting original IPs to come out of Nintendo for a while. The game itself takes the form of a third person shooter in which the player can shoot paint around at surfaces and opponents. The inks used also allow for different abilities, such as speeding the player up or giving them somewhere to hide. The game is essentially a territorial shooter and will have team mechanics, with the overall aim being to cover as much territory as possible in your team's ink.

SONIC X-TREME Being Remade By Fans

Those who remember the Saturn era will likely remember that the console never did have a proper Sonic game. Something of an error on SEGA's part in hindsight. What it did have was a cancelled game called **Sonic X-Treme**, which has become something of a legend in the vapourware community.

The game was to feature a weird fish-eye camera and SEGA hyped it immensely before never releasing it. Now it appears that a group of fans have decided to complete development of the game and release it for the PC.

game and release it for the PC.

Knowing SEGA this is likely going to be shut down at some point in much the same way as the **Streets of Rage** remake from a few years back. Still, it's an interesting project and one that will certainly capture the interest of fans of SEGA's underappreciated console. Video of the game can be found on YouTube and an early build of the game featuring one level has been announced. More should be coming at some point, assuming SEGA don't put the kibosh on the whole thing.



THE LATEST **GAMING RELEASES** REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



DEVELOPER: READY AT DAWN / PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Welcome ladies and gentlemen, to the best movie on the PlayStation 4. With three hours of gameplay and two hours of cutscenes, The Order: 1886 proves how outstanding next-gen visuals can be while wasting every last shred of potential on offer.

Set in an alternate history universe, the game follows the steampunk nighimmortal Knights of the Round Table as they face down hordes of werewolves. Backed by a young Nikola Tesla, the Order soon faces rebellions from the downtrodden lower class lacking their protection, forcing them to fight the very

ones they swore to protect.

While an outstanding concept in every sense, the sad truth is that the story squanders every element of this. Barely getting into the universe, so many details hyped from the start are brushed aside or overlooked in favour of a watered-down story. Hitting every single last overplayed cliché imaginable right down to the "we're not so different, you and I" villain speech, players get a predictable tale which barely gets going before ending on borderline sequel bait. While the voice actors offer solid performances, the script is so devoid of charm that it fails to offer anything

Only compounding this problem further is the gameplay. Taking a leaf out of Aliens: Colonial Marines' book, developer Ready at Dawn teases werewolves but then

leaves you spending half the title fighting basic humans. These are sadly also the few times where the game truly shines through, showing serious potential for a good third person shooter, but they're few and far between. All else was sacrificed to force cinematic linearity into the game, but without a serious story to back it up a-la The Wolf Among Us this falls flat.

If there is one thing to truly praise, it's that The Order: 1886 never fails to look anything but truly glorious. Despite the letterboxing, 30 fps and other issues, the presentation is astounding and the attention to detail truly astonishing to behold. It gives an impression of what the consoles could be capable of with highly detailed textures, environments and reactions, and the sound quality is crisp beyond belief. Sadly, this doesn't mean much without solid gameplay.

The Order: 1886 is ultimately the second coming of Rhyse: Son of Rome. It's an experiment, showing what the PlayStation 4 is capable of visually, but failing to back up that flash with any serious substance. What little we get shows some serious potential, but it proves to be little more than a teaser leaving you wanting an actual full game. Really, it simply runs out of steam all too quickly to justify a full price purchase.

CALLUM SHEPHARD







EVOLVE

DEVELOPER: TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES / PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As the latest effort to return asymmetrical multiplayer combat to the AAA industry, Evolve has ridden a wave of controversy to its release date. From devs all but boasting about their DLC plans to severe communication problems with the public, opinions over this one have been extremely divisive.

have been extremely divisive.
The gameplay is simple:
You go in as a group of hunters
and try to pin down and kill a
monster, or play as the monster
trying to consume wildlife and
gradually enhance its own

abilities. Forcing each side to take a very different route to victory is a work of genius as it means both teams aren't competing for the same goals, and offers a far more dynamic alternative to MMORPG boss raiding. This is especially evident with an extremely varied selection of characters and monsters, all of whom fulfil their roles in extremely different ways. One medic has healing grenades, another a beam, another can only directly resurrect the fallen, and each

monster has similarly opposing strengths and weaknesses.

The real meat of the game comes about when the monster is pinned down and both sides engage one another. With the monster left trying to break free and hunters slowly sapping its strength, displaying the real advantage of this style of multiplayer release, proving to be an entertaining mix of third person brawling and FPS fighting. Just where the monster is engaged and how much time it has had to chow down on the local wildlife is crucial to pinning it down, and when done well it makes for some truly entertaining running skirmishes.

The chief issue with Evolve is its lack of encouragement to have players directly engage one another, but also its inability to truly balance individual skill. As team mates are far more reliant upon one another as humans than in Left 4 Dead, a bad player can easily bring the whole team down. A bad monster will just end the game quickly, while by comparison a good monster will just turn and hide, turning the match into a lengthy, eventless chase. Without truly complex tracking abilities from the

hunters or more varied PvE elements, all too often, this results in an empty experience hurts Evolve's longevity.

To put it bluntly, we've seen better than this - far better, both in recent years and prior releases. Compared with Giants: Citizen Kabuto, it lacks the complexity and depth of the varied factions. Matched with Depth or Left 4 Dead, it lacks the continual combat, activity, map variety and flexibility when it comes to how you engage your foes. While it has its moments, for all the hype behind it Evolve is simply nothing special.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

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GAME OF THRONES: THE LOST LORDS

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: TELLTALE GAMES / PLATFORM: PS3, PS4, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE, WINDOWS, MAC OS X, iOS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The second episode of Telltale's Game of Thrones game picks up right from the final moments of the first, and by that, we largely mean that the decisions that you made back in Episode One (some of which you've likely forgotten about by this point until they come back to bite you on the arse) influence how things play out at times here.

As with the first instalment, the focus of the attention here is House Forrester, formerly sworn to House Stark before the whole 'Red Wedding' massacre went down. Joining a lot of the familiar faces of the first episode, we get introduced to Asher Forrester and his story, with him having ran off to Yunkai to make a life for himself there. This episode sees Asher begin to make his way back home in the wake of the developing troubles between House Forrester and Ramsay Snow et al. We also pick things up with Gared Tuttle's trek to The Wall and his wish to became a Ranger... which also serves as Jon Snow's entrance into the game. Mira Forrester is over at King's Landing and

trying her best to get Margaery Tyrell's backing for her family, and then there's Rodrick Forrester's path to becoming the Lord of his House in the wake of the deaths of his father and younger brother.

The Lost Lords is just as brutal as the first episode and there's enough adult language to shock a nun with Tourette's. The violence is plentiful and gory, and a lot of the decisions that you choose to make will have you further contemplating them hours and days after they were made. There's also the intrigue factor of just how your decisions will play out not just in this outing but in future episodes (this is the second of a planned six).

Much like the first episode,
The Lost Lords does at times
feel a little plodding. In fact, the
plodding and slow-burn is far
worse here than in Iron from
Ice. As a result, the story and
action feels as gripping as it is
infuriating. There's one moment
early on where you literally
have to spend time essentially
learning to walk.

Despite often flowing as uneasy as a geriatric's bowel movements, this episode does have some memorable and shocking moments to offer players. It's also great to get a further insight into Jon Snow's mind-set on the matter of the Red Wedding and how Robb Stark was killed (no mention of mother Catelyn, mind).

This is certainly an up and down episode, although the overall story arc is played out rather wonderfully when it's allowed to gather some momentum. It's just that the pacing feels just too unbalanced. Slow-burn is good, but the only way that certain moments of The Lost Lords could go any slower is if the game itself froze.

ANDREW POLLARD







IRONFALL: INVASION

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: VD-DEV / PLATFORM: 3DS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

IronFall: Invasion arrives via the 3DS eShop with much anticipation, not only because it's the first of its kind (a Third-Person Shooter) on the 3DS, but also because of the way it is distributed. You can download a small portion of the single player campaign and multiplayer for free, and if you like it you can purchase the full thing. It's an interesting premise and a unique way to distribute the game reminiscent of shareware in the '90s.

VD-Dev is a team best

known for their handheld work, and on the 3DS IronFall looks stunning. It is certainly a spectacle to behold on a handheld console and proves that other games of its kind could work and would be more than welcome on the 3DS console. The obvious comparison to make is Gears of War. If you have played Gears of War you will know what to expect from IronFall Invasion. You shoot, run in to cover, then pop out after shooting wave after wave of enemies. There are,

however, other comparisons; the futuristic setting is reminiscent of Perfect Dark and the level design feels similar to the classic shooter, and that's the problem with the single player campaign. It feels like a game that's been ported from that era, and not ported all that well. It's occasionally clunky control wise, the detection isn't the best, and you may often find yourself getting stuck in cover.

The multiplayer, however, is where IronFall: Invasion shines. In six-player death matches IronFall is at its most fun, but it also brings up another flaw. You will need a Circle Pad Pro or new 3DS to play, as if you try to play it without these you will find it a very frustrating experience. The multi-player interface is well designed and (from this reviewer's experience) it was relatively easy to get a match.

The story of IronFall: Invasion is fairly non-existent. You battle a race of aliens that look like a cross between the Cybermen of Doctor Who and the Cylons in Battlestar Galactica, and they never feel like worthy adversaries for your armour-wearing hero. The script is woeful and the voice acting

is terrible. It's hard to tell if it is meant to be terrible (in a tongue-in-cheek way) or if it's just plain terrible. In 2015, we expect much more of storytelling in gaming, and the script and story in IronFall: Invasion make it look amateurish.

The game doesn't do anything unique, apart from being fortunate enough to be the only shooter bar Resident Evil: Revelations available on Nintendo's handheld. It's really quite flawed, but it's a fun multiplayer experience and the unique pricing structure means it's worth giving it a blast for free anyway.

ROD MCCANCE

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DRAGON BALL XENOVERSE

DEVELOPER: DIMPS / PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO GAMES / PLATFORM: PC, PS3, PS4, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The enduringly punchy anime franchise returns for its fifteenth instalment (fifteen!) - this time, in colourful next-gen. Non-followers of the franchise will be mystified by a beat 'em up which wastes little time in getting down to business, throwing players into a series of battles straight from Dragon Ball history, with not a word of context or reason.

The story, when it arrives, is this: someone is trashing time, replaying key battles from Dragon Ball lore, but making it so as the bad guys win. Like

the Abrams Star Trek reboot, but with even bigger hair and less lens flare. Plenty of flair, though - whether or not you know what's going on, its fight sequences are big and showy, with you taking flight and punching your opponents across vast vistas and beautiful landscapes, twatting them with brightly coloured energy blasts and otherwise beating the hell out of one another in a manner befitting a Marvel vs. Capcom game or less dour version of Injustice. It even manages something

the big superhero games haven't to date – a good flight mechanic. Aerial fighting is as well done and thought out as the grounded stuff (even more so, in places), doing a good job of making the player feel as ridiculously overpowered as any character in the TV show.

And, like last year's South Park and the Stick of Truth, this game does an excellent job of making players feel as though they have been dropped in the very middle of an episode of the TV series. The story isn't quite so great (although fans of each may vary on that opinion) but the animation is superb. Even better, like South Park, its character creator lets you craft your own Dragon Ball persona and slot him in right next to the heroes and villains of the show. There (again, like South Park) you'll spend much of your time levelling up and grinding in preparation for the story battles. It may be mostly beat 'em up, but Dragon Ball XenoVerse follows the old MMO tradition of not letting you do anything until you've levelled up enough. Side missions and repetition, then, are your friend.

In between that, you'll spend much of your time wandering around a curiously dull hub (Toki-Toki City) - unable to punch anything, it's down to preordained conversation options and hilariously daft dance-move style mime as you interact with the (brainless) locals and (possibly also brainless) online chums. You're never far away from a good fight though, and in this respect, it's a little like Destiny, only with repetitive punching instead of repetitive shooting. Pretty as it may be, a lot of that fighting is a case of button mashing until someone falls over, while we would have liked the environments to be much more destructible in this next-gen, 3D living anime day and age. Injustice has truly spoiled us.

Long-time fans should love it, while newcomers will be baffled but entertained. For a series now past its fifteenth entry, Dragon Ball XenoVerse finds the franchise to be in rude health. Just not, you know, as rude as those South Park guys.

JOEL HARLEY

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RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT THE WORLD OF RETRO GAMING BY CHRIS JACKSON



MOVIE MISTAKES

e all know the score with videogame movie adaptations by now, don't we? Generally speaking, they're pretty terrible. We've definitely covered a fair amount of movie tie-ins on these pages before now, but usually on the whole we like to keep things fairly positive. Recently though, we've uncovered some absolute horrors that have brought a terrifying murky brown cloud down around these parts. We'll get back to the good stuff eventually, but take the next couple of Retro Bytes columns as a warning - don't go anywhere near any of these. Unless you like bad games, of course. In which case, knock yourself out!

The Wizard of Oz (1993)

Worst things first then, this is the one that kicked off the idea for this column. The Wizard of Oz movie is undeniably a masterpiece, you'd have to be as heartless as the Tin Man himself to claim otherwise. This game is a whole other story though. Seemingly created by people with less than half the brains of the Scarecrow, half an hour with this will leave you shaking in the corner like the Cowardly Lion. It'll probably make you feel like putting the boots into poor little Toto as well, it's that bad.

As you might imagine, you play as Dorothy (or occasionally a friend of Dorothy, as the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Cowardly Lion are all controllable throughout the game) and your task is to make your way to find the Wizard in the Emerald City. To do this, Dorothy needs to travel through four different countries (incorporating locations found

in The Wizard of Oz animated series) which contain around eight levels in each. Collecting bricks will eventually build a bridge for Dorothy to travel to the next country, and tickets also need to be collected in order to gain admittance to the Wizard's chamber at the end of the game. The problem is, I've made that sound about a million times better than it actually is...

One of the main things you'd expect from a platforming game is some degree of reliable jumping mechanics, but one of the main things the developers forgot to include in this game was any degree of reliable jumping mechanics. If you don't land precisely in the centre of whatever it is you're aiming for, you're going to fall right through it and end up dead. Except sometimes it'll turn out that you're just not allowed to jump onto whatever it was. Seriously, it's impossible to tell what you can or can't jump on in this game so you end up just trying to get on top of anything and everything in the hope that somehow you'll find where you're supposed to be going.

As well as not being able to tell what you're allowed to jump on, there's absolutely no distinction between parts of the scenery and things that will kill you. It's completely infuriating, you'll be wandering along and suddenly find yourself getting attacked by a tiny mouse running along a fence in the background that you can barely even see. Perspectives are seriously buggered in this game. You learn quite quickly that anything could potentially be a threat, so you end up shooting magic cubes all over the place just to be on the



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safe side. And then you realise you've run out of magic cubes, and the only place you can get them is back in the first level! So you're left with a basic kick attack, which is no use whatsoever. Enemies are often either too high up or too low down, but the developers, in their greatest wisdom, thought it would be OK to make a platformer without including the ability to attack while jumping or crouching.

Things don't improve when you swap characters. The Scarecrow has limited health and can be killed instantly by fire, the Cowardly Lion possesses the ability to climb trees as well as a rather amusing bitchslap sort of attack but he buggers off after he dies once and you never get to see him again, and the Tin Man is the most useless of all because he can't even jump. A platform game where one of the characters can't jump. It's just absolutely baffling!

Good luck making it to the end of this

Good luck making it to the end of this one. It's a real shame it didn't work out too well, because with a bit more care and attention it could have been something really special. As it stands though, file it next to Barbie and Superman 64 in the "worst games of all time" section!

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1991)

Nothing really comes close to the horrors of Oz, but don't worry, no loads get blown too early round these parts! There are a few different Last Crusade games, and luckily for us they're pretty much all atrocious. Taito's 1991 NES version of the game is a particular lowlight, even though it scores a few points for at least trying to follow the plot of the film - right at the beginning, Indy receives a package containing his dad's Grail Diary, and heads off to find whatever bit of treasure it is this time. To do this, you'll end up running backwards and forwards on the deck of a ship, battering loads of thugs until their boss turns up and you get to batter him as well. It sounds like loads of fun, but it really isn't. The screen bobs up and down constantly, just to remind you that



you're on a ship. It was probably quite a neat idea at the time, but coupled with the garishly-coloured enemies (why anyone would feel threatened by a bunch of bad guys wearing a combination of bright blue trousers, a purple jumper and red what appear to be high-heeled shoes is beyond me), it didn't half bring on one of my heads.

Your attacks are so weak that the baddies take an absurd amount of punishment before they go down, and the whole thing is soundtracked by some quite horrible bleepy squelchy "music" (they even managed to ruin the iconic theme tune by adding too many terrifying trouser cough noises). If you can persevere with this nonsense for long enough, your reward is... an infuriating sliding block puzzle! Successfully complete the picture of the Holy Grail, and you're off to beat up some Nazis. Because it's always Nazis.

To be honest, this was the point where I lost the will to live. That first level followed by the shitty sliding block puzzle don't exactly scream "keep playing me". Wonder if one of the later Indy games might be any good...

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade: The Action Game (1992)

With an extra year in development you'd think this one might be a bit better, right? Wrong! Many versions of "The Action Game" were released for pretty much every available console between 1989-92, and every version was pretty much the same apart from differences in graphics and sound which is to be expected. The Mega Drive version is easily the prettiest of the lot, so let's have a look at that one because at least then it's one less thing to moan about.

And my word is there ever a lot to moan about here! Despite being an adventurer, Indiana Jones cannot swim in this game. He hates water so much that it kills him. He's also rubbish at jumping, nine times out of ten preferring to fall off the edge of things instead of leaping into the air when you tell him to. He can't attack when climbing ropes, either. What a useless adventurer!

The speed of the game is a major downer - spikes fall from the ceiling so quickly that half the time you don't even see them coming, but Indy's general movement is so slow that it's almost impossible to duck under or jump over enemy attacks anyway. And the bit where you have to ride the mine cart... Miss the jump, you're dead. And you're definitely going to miss the jump because you won't be able to see it coming. Even once you know what to do, Indy will never respond to your button presses in time to make it. On the plus side, you do at least get a whip to smack things with, but the brown lining for this is that it gets weaker and weaker the more you use it. After half a dozen flicks or so, you might as well be wafting a fistful of soggy tissues into the bad guys' faces for all the good it seems to do.

If you're in the mood for something awful, or if you just want to see how things used to be before game testing was invented, any of these titles will keep you going for a good few minutes. Join us next month for a few more horrors, and after that we'll be able to get back to enjoying things again!



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



ay the words 'Tarot cards' to some people, and they'll immediately assume that you're talking about a technique used to 'predict' the future. In the UK and America especially, we associate the word tarot with the Rider-Waite deck (and its variants), a set of cards specifically designed to aid in fortune telling. Setting aside people's belief in the occult, these cards actually form a reasonable technique for creating randomised narratives. The vast and varied human experience can be summarised by some variation of these 78 cards and this secular approach has seen the cards used in story-led gaming.

Ars Magica games designer Jonathan Tweet used the tarot as his inspiration for the game Everway, a fantasy roleplaying game set in a multiverse of traditional fantasy world tropes. Completely diceless, the game used three stats: Karma, Drama and Fortune. It relied on a mutual storytelling; the players and the games master collaborated to tell an adventure, with the Drama and Fortune cards being used to add enough change to prevent

things from getting too light or too dark. The various decks of cards worked in different ways; vision cards were used for establishing back story, whereas The Fortune Deck used Tarot-like imagery to introduce novel story elements. The game sort of worked, but its main criticism was it was more drama-group activity than an RPG.

Those with long memories may remember that TSR followed suit (pun intended) with a Ravenloft themed set of Tarot cards. Ravenloft was a Hammer Horror themed variant of Dungeons and Dragons, and the cards neither served as inspiration nor as a nice prop. It was a cashin, and an ill thought-out one, but then so was a lot of D&D stuff from the 1990's.

Of course, Tarot cards have been the back bone of trick-taking card games since the 15th century; many gamers in the UK know these games exist but they aren't readily available and most people don't really know how to play. Known as Tarocco, Tarocc, Tarocchi and Tarock, most variants typically involve sticking a pile of cards face up in the middle of the

playing area, each person playing cards from their hand in order to improve their overall score. Multiple rounds are played, with the most points scored making the winner. There are many, many variants (far too many to go into with any detail or accuracy), but the cards themselves are different from the cards used for Tarot readings; the 22 major cards tend to be illustrated, but the suit cards aren't.

Those looking to acquaint themselves with Tarot as a card game would be advised to try River Horse's The Tarot of Loka. This four player card game uses two teams of two. Its main variant is the introduction of two additional meta-suits; good and evil. They interact with the other cards and each other, substantially skewing the tactics of the game. The set uses earth, air, fire and water instead of clubs, coins or what have you. This enhances the 'fantasy' feel to the game. The major arcana are similarly fantasy themed. It works well as a regular deck of playing cards or for playing regular trick-taking games. It's pretty enough to appeal to most geeks without being too weird as to put the more superstitious off; this is a game rather than anything else. It's

also very pretty without being too strange.
Talking of card games, Magic: the
Gathering is at it again. They recently
released another duel deck, this time
featuring another two Planeswalkers:
Elspeth vs. Kiora. Wizards of the Coast have
been pushing the Planeswalkers recently
(you can get action figures of them), but
this new addition is rather nifty. The set has
two decks, one for each magic user. Elspeth
is a straightforward white deck, with a sun
theme. Lots of plains, lots of soldiers, and
plays like a hot summer's day; it gets much
hotter as the game goes on, backing each





other up. Kiora on the other hand is a blue/ green deck filled with weird creatures and kraken - lots and lots of kraken. If you like throwing horrible things on the board and at the same time slowing down your opponent, this is the deck for you. It's not terribly sneaky (like many water decks are) but it is fun. In my gaming group, we all adore Kiora.

Sticking with the theme of card games, but heading toward a galaxy far, far away, Star Wars: Empire Versus Rebellion. This nifty and fast-moving card game has kept me going whilst I've been waiting for that new Star Wars movie to come out. Even better, it's based on the original movies (honestly, there were prequels? I never noticed).

Each game is based on an event, such as acquiring the Death Star plans, evacuating the Rebel base at Hoth or The Battle for Endor. One side plays the Rebels, and the other plays the Empire, and the aim is to win' that event. Win enough events, win the game. Personally, I find it more fun to play the alleged bad guys, mostly because they always seem to have the most fun.

Each player has cards and resources at their disposal, represented by the cards they draw. The Empire has piles of troopers, ships and the like, but very little in way of heroes. The Rebels on the other hand, have loads of good guys but little actual might. The result is that the

Empire is always trying to lure its foe into a straight-up fight whereas the Rebels sneak round to achieve their goals, using diplomacy and cunning to circumvent the brutality and power of the Empire. It's absurdly fun and stupidly easy to pick up, even a Wookiee could win. It's also quite deep in places, and those who enjoy the Star Wars LLCG will find this a nice little appetiser, as well as a way of getting friends into Star Wars themed gaming.

Speaking of Star Wars, our continuing love affair with the Star Wars: X-Wing Miniatures Game continues. So far, we've simply had the dear old Rebellion bashing the heck out of the Empire, blowing up TIE-Fighters left, right and centre. I've had way too much fun throwing waves of TIEs and Lambda shuttles at the Rebels, but my personal favourite has been using the rather well designed Slave-1 model to cause havoc, which up until now has only been available to Empire players. Luckily for me, Boba Fett's signature ship has proven so popular that he's pretty much got his own faction, appropriately named 'Scum and Villainy'.

The core expansion set (also called Scum and Villainy) comes with three repainted ships: two Z-95 Headhunters and a Y-wing. These are painted to look rough and ready. In case you've forgotten what a Z-95 looks like, they're the not-

quite X-Wing looking ships familiar to fans of the Clone Wars show. It makes sense that criminal types are using old ships like this to fight their battles. It also comes with cards to let you field a Firespray (like Slave-1) and a HWK-290 (Kyle Katarn's ship. Remember Kyle Katarn?). Other expansion sets include the Star Viper (from Shadows of the Empire), M3A Scyk (signature ship of the Hutts) and IG-2000, Assassin Droid IG-88's assault crate.

We've been playing with these lot at the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome, and we've completely welcomed them into the game. There comes a time when any miniatures game needs a sneaky and clever faction. Star Fleet Battles fans tend to adore the Romulans for that reason (thanks to their mines and cloaking powers) and Warhammer 40K players acknowledge that the Dark Eldar are all about the cunning rather than strength. In Scum and Villainy, the sneakiness comes filled with flavour. Rather than a horde of generic TIE fighters, we get a host of individuals, each working for their own reasons, each with a host of clever get-outs up their sleeve. IG-2000 works especially well with other ships of the same kind, thanks to its power to network up (it is a droid, after all.) It's evocative of the franchise and utterly spot on. Some fans are wondering why a repainted Millennium Falcon isn't available with the faction, though to my mind, Han Solo may very well be a scruffy-looking nerf-herder, but he's hardly a scumbag and he's certainly not villainous. Time will tell if the fans will get a re-painted Falcon for their Hutt-based fleet, but to be honest, I'd rather see models based on Star Wars Rebels come out next. (Imagine the Ghost, the Phantom and a repainted TIE. They'd be awesome.)

In the meantime, I remain undefeated thanks to everyone's favourite Sarlacc snack Boha Fett

Ed Fortune can tweeted at @ed_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM AROUND THE WEB THIS MONTH







HULK SMASH!

We've been scouring the depths of the internet for the coolest merchandise tying in with this month's big Avengers release, and our excitedly wide eyes were drawn to these incredible Age of Ultron models, available to pre-order from Sideshow Collectibles (sideshowtoy. com). The details are so precise that you can practically hear the cogs whirring inside Iron Man's Hulkbuster armour, admire each of Hulk's individual chest hairs, and marvel at the lack of strings on Ultron. Those with anger management issues of their own, however, are advised to resist the urge to pit their figures against each other — you wouldn't want to do any damage, as Hulk and Ultron are worth 375 of those American dollars, while Hulkbuster would set you back \$825. The only Civil War that follows on from these figures is between you and your bank manager.



ULTRON PRIME - SIXTH SCALE FIGURE PRODUCED BY HOT TOYS AVAILABLE FROM SIDESHOWTOY.COM (PRE-ORDER) \$374.99

HULK - SIXTH SCALE FIGURE PRODUCED BY HOT TOYS AVAILABLE FROM SIDESHOWTOY.COM (PRE-ORDER) \$274.99

IRON MAN HULKBUSTER - SIXTH SCALE FIGURE PRODUCED BY HOT TOYS AVAILABLE FROM SIDESHOWTOY.COM (PRE-ORDER) \$824.99





Geek Chic

If you fancy treating yourself to some merchandise without turning your wallet into a post-apocalyptic wasteland, check out the range of cool clothing we've found.

With these T-shirts from alltheheroes.co.uk, you can strike fear into the galaxy's most wanted using the face of the Empire's favourite bounty hunter Boba Fett or of that most swindling of raccoons, Guardians of the Galaxy's Rocket. Well, they may not offer the protection of full Mandalorian armour, but people might think twice before crossing you. The Fett one does have the word 'ASSASSIN' on it, after all (don't worry, we can assure you that the Tees are extremely hardy so that writing won't be coming off in the wash - jeez, would your face be red...)

Alternatively, with these secret HYDRA sitting on your arse watching TV yoga pants from **thinkgeek.com**, you can be just as physically fit and relentlessly photogenic in the face of danger as the cast of Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. (and as



Going back to the Guardians of the Galaxy, this 'I Am Doctor' T-shirt from shirtwoot.com, depicting the surprisingly crowd-pleasing tree creature as the twelve incarnations of Gallifrey's most famous Time Lord, is cute enough to put a smile on anyone's face – even that guy whose Hulkbuster figurine you broke. Those with more retro tastes will enjoy this Jem and the

Holograms T-shirt from truffleshuffle.co.uk.

STAR WARS (ASSASSIN) T-SHIRT - £11.75 AVAILABLE FROM ALLTHEHEROES.CO.UK

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY (ROCKET POWERED) T-SHIRT - £12.99 AVAILABLE FROM ALLTHEHEROES.CO.UK

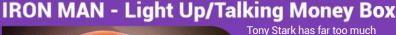
I AM DOCTOR T-SHIRT - \$10 + SHIPPING AVAILABLE FROM SHIRTWOOT.COM

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK HAIL HYDRA YOGA PANTS - \$39.99 + SHIPPING AVAILABLE FROM THINKGEEK.COM

LADIES JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS BAND ROLLED SLEEVE T-SHIRT - £19.99 AVAILABLE FROM TRUFFLESHUFFLE.CO.UK









money to fit into one piggy bank, but younger geniuses who haven't quite got their international technology conglomerates set up yet will be able to use this Iron Man helmet to gather together their set-up funds.

What's more, when a touch sensor is activated, Iron Man will light up, talk to you, and even repeat everything you say! It's the first step to developing your own fully artificial intelligence, in the manner of Ultron – and obviously nothing can go wrong with that...

IRON MAN: TALKING MONEY BOX AVAILABLE FROM EBAY £15-£20



STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ANDREW KEATES PHOTOS: ANNE DAVIES



hat is a convention? It's a term that we all know and love, however in this modern age of signing events and comic cons. the term 'convention' is often perverted to suit the needs of marking a big event, rather than actually expressing what a jolly good old-fashioned convention should be. In my opinion, a convention is about getting a bunch of fans together in a hotel for a few days and plying them with things to do, see, buy, play and participate in. It's about being able to spend time with your heroes, to party with them, to provide a place where fans can meet fans and geek out. It's about hiding away from the real world and for a few precious days being surrounded by extraordinary people and things to do. It does not mean walking around a giant dealers' room where the only opportunity to connect with a top-billed guest is within a paddock where you might be lucky to get three minutes of their time to have something signed for £20 a pop. I'm happy to report that now in its 21st year, the SFBall is a convention in the truest sense and it's still the best convention in the country. A convention created by fans for fans and I loved it.

The SFBall ran for three days in their new home, the Grand Harbour Hotel in Southampton. Upon arrival, I discovered the concierge dressed in a Star Trek: The Original Series red uniform (unlucky for some). Automatically, I assumed he had been held at phaser point to wear such a thing, but instead he insisted the whole staff had wanted to dress up and had gone out of their way to source costumes themselves. It was this kind of attitude that made everyone so welcome. Everyone that came along remarked at the excellence of the service. facilities and staff at the Grand Harbour. I have since learnt the organisers will be returning to the same venue next year and all of the rooms have already been booked



for the next SFBall (luckily there are some other excellent hotels nearby for those who might like to come along to SFBall 22).

Friday's highlights included an opening ceremony with not only a stage full of guests, including Robert Duncan McNeill, James Cosmo, Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred, Manu Intiraymi, Robert Rankin, Jamie Anderson, Julian Lee Seager, Lee Sullivan and Lee Bradley, but also a welcome from long standing director of SFB Events, Anne Lindup, who reminded us not only of all the great fun that lav ahead of us. but also that the SFB was a not-for-profit company and all proceeds were going to their chosen charity, the Teenage Cancer Trust. I think special mention should also go to the technical wizards who created a very impressive LCD backlit display that showed bespoke videos, trailers and backdrops for all of the events on stage.

Other Friday highlights included a 'Con-Dan Workshop' teaching many new attendees the various line-dance style convention dances that would crop up at the parties, a Sci-Fi pub quiz, talks from many of the guests throughout the day and another spectacle of technical wizardry as teams battled it out in interactive, panel-game like creations of Double or Drop and Geek [Block] Busters, rounded off with a disco to put Saturday Night Fever to shame.

On the Saturday, as many emerged bleary-eyed from the evening's festivities they were greeted with another packed schedule





of events. Including tea-dueling, a corridor of Doctor Who monsters, a table-top gaming room, a model exhibition, talks from all of the guests, a steampunk exhibition, packed dealers' rooms and even a life-sized remote controlled Dalek that regularly emerged from the hotel lifts terrifying anyone that may have stood in its way.

But the highlight of the Ball is the Saturday evening, where an enormous hall is transformed into an evening of fine dining and cabaret (this year the spiffing Professor Elemental and some rather eclectic burlesque dancers). If you are considering booking for next year, I highly recommend you take the full weekend package for the sole reason of attending this part of the convention. The food served was utterly delicious, the décor wonderful and the coming together of all the stars, volunteers, charity representatives, attendees and even the Mayor of Southampton made this a truly unique event. Of course, this was all rounded off with another party. I tell you, you haven't lived until you've seen Sylvester McCoy playing the spoons to the Macarena, Robert Duncan McNeill leading a conga and Jamie Anderson dancing to the Joe Ninety Theme.

By Sunday, most were crawling out of their hotel rooms to take part in the third day of festivities, including more talks, signings, last minute bargains in the dealers' room and even a live game show version of Universally Challenged (University Challenge), which this correspondent was dragged on stage to take part in and won! However, our opponents had all been born in the late nineties...

By the end of this packed weekend you could feel hundreds of people sigh with sadness when the closing ceremony announced that all that was left to do was thank everyone and to look forward to a last night of partying and karaoke. But what was particularly moving was to discover that over £3,500 had been raised for the Teenage Cancer Trust.

This is a weekend for everyone. An opportunity to make new friends, to truly get close to your heroes, have every opportunity to take part in a host of activities and help raise money for the extraordinary Teenage Cancer Trust. Book your tickets now because there is no other event quite as special as the SFBall.



Joining the fans at SFBall 21 were STAR TREK: VOYAGER'S ROBERT DUNCAN McNEILL (Tom Paris) and MANU INTIRAYMI (Icheb). STARBURST caught up with the pair to reminisce about their time in the Delta Quadrant...

STARBURST: Robbie, you were trained as an actor at the Julliard School. What was that like?

Robert Duncan McNeill: Actually I was a Julliard dropout! I didn't graduate.

What happened?

RDM: I moved to New York from Atlanta, Georgia where I grew up and I wanted to pursue a career in the theatre. By this time I had mostly done Musical Theatre. So my first two years, when I was 18/19 I stayed in New York doing musicals, I did a lot of regional theatre, I got my Equity card Off Broadway in a show called Preppies, but I was just doing a lot of musicals in the ensemble and not getting any auditions for lead roles. So I started to strategise about what I could do to change that. So I auditioned for the three top acting schools in the US and one of those was Julliard. And I got in. So I went there for about a year and a half and as soon as it was on my resume, I wasn't auditioning for the chorus of a musical anymore, instead I was now auditioning for the lead in a movie or play or television series. Then I got cast on a daytime drama called All My Children and I think I was paid \$450 a day and was guaranteed a day and a half's work a week. So I was basically getting paid about \$700 a week and I thought I had won the lottery. Back then that seemed like a fortune

Did you think you could transition from musical theatre into film and television?

RDM: No. Not at all. It sort of happened by accident. The only reason I was going for film or television was because of the money. Luckily, I had been getting some jobs but I wasn't getting ahead financially. Now and then you'd hear about somebody getting a TV pilot or commercial and you'd say, 'well that's the only way to make any money'. I realised I wasn't going to make any money in the theatre.

Manu Intiraymi: I was such a judgemental, terrible person back then in the Voyager years. Because when I first met you, my mind went 'there's just some surfer dude from Malibu who decided that he thinks he's pretty enough to be on TV'.

RDM: You're a lot prettier than me!

MI: And I pretty much thought that for years. I had no idea that you had training and you were a musical theatre guy. I convinced myself of those things.

Manu, you came onto Star Trek: Voyager as a young man. Do you ever look back at those years and wish you had a more typical youth, rather than intense filming schedules?

MI: No. I was 21. But most people think of the character as 16 or 17 years old, but at the time I considered myself to be a man. Now I'm 36 and when I look back I guess I was a kid, but I completely enjoyed my years working on the show. I thought that the work was excellent. Pretty much every day I'll catch myself watching Voyager and not to toot my own horn, I'm very proud of the work I did. It was worth the long hours. The show was a good show. And not only that, it had a message. A lot of shows just sell Budweiser or the army or trucks or any of the other propaganda that comes with American commercials and they often haven't got much to say between the actual commercials either. But Voyager had a lot to say and I'm proud of what we created.

How was it coming into a pre-established family of actors?

MI: I felt really comfortable and welcomed right off the bat. Unlike many other television

shows I've done where you're a recurring guest star. Sometimes you can get a lot of flack from the other actors, they say 'Is he going to steal my scenes', 'is he going to steal my episodes'. And I didn't feel any of that on Voyager. I felt part of the team from the get-go.

RDM: We had a good cast of really good people. They were always so welcoming to anyone that worked on the show.

Robbie, you appeared on Star Trek: The Next Generation playing Nick Locarno. There are so many parallels with both characters, why didn't they just cast you as the same role in Star Trek: Voyager?

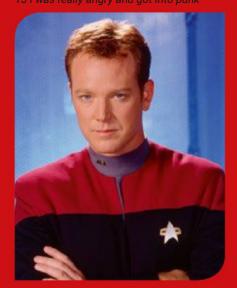
RDM: Well theres a Writers Guild rule that wher a writer writes an episode and if one of their characters is used later on, then that writer gets a royalty or a residule. So whoever wrote that Next Generation episode, even if it's just their name on the front of the script and say someone like Rick Berman had re-written it then that writer is still entitled to a small piece of the royalty of all the other episodes that character appears in.

So is Tom Paris really Nick Locarno with a different name?

RDM: They did audition a lot of people for the role but I think they did have that Nick Locarno character as a sort of shape always in mind. Obviously it worked out that they were interested in seeing me audition for Tom Paris, because they had that shape as a model. I heard afterwards that they had thought about Nick Locarno coming onto Deep Space Nine as some kind of freighter pilot due to being kicked out of Starfleet Academy. But it didn't pan out, but they revisited that for Voyager. Then when it came to it they decided to just change the name and keep the shape.

What is your biggest regret? The one thing you could change.

MI: When I was 13 I had a tough time growing up in general with '60s, antiestablishment generation parents and all their issues with what they went through. So I moved all the time and my father was in trouble all the time. So when I was 13 I was really angry and got into punk



rock, drugs, blah blah blah. And I treated my mother so badly. I blamed her for everything. So from 13 to 21 I would have friends over the house drinking beers, breaking stuff and I just pushed her around and bullied her. And I remember coming back to her when I was 22 and my mom said to me, 'I don't even know if you love me. I thought I had lost my son'. And my heart broke. I asked myself how could I have done that to my mom? Now I have a great relationship with my mother and I love her to death. But it was hormones and anger and I hurt her and if I could go back and live my life again, I'd go back and treat my mom better

RDM: It's hard to pick one. But one big regret I have with my mother, when I was young, right when I left home at 17 to leave for New York. My mother phoned me right before I left and told me she had been diagnosed with cancer. She was very sick and I was so young and I had never experienced anyone fighting cancer in my youth. So I didn't really know what that meant, I knew it was bad, but I could't comprehend it. I didn't know what to do, so my mother struggled with cancer for over a year and a half and as she was getting towards the end of her struggles, I went home to visit her, but I was very torn and as she was getting sicker and sicker, I didn't know whether to go back to New York and concentrate on my acting or stay with my mother. I remember going to her doctor one day and saying, 'what's happening? Is she going to live any longer? Should I stay? I've been here two months and I feel like my life is in limbo and I don't know what to do'. And he said, 'I don't know, you have to make that decision yourself'. Anyway, I got a call from New York not long after that and asking me to be in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat. So I decided to go back to New York because my mother seemed to be stable. But you can already imagine the ending of this story, as soon as I got to New York, a week or two later she passed away. I really regret that. I wish I had been there when she passed away.

If you could go back and give your younger self some advice, what would it be?

MI: After Voyager I would go back and tell myself to 'take this seriously'. I got it too easy. I moved to LA and within two years I was doing really rather well. My buddies at the time were James Franco, Colin Hanks, Shane West, Aaron Paul and all these kids that have mega careers. But I was partying hard. It's a typical Hollywood story of a kid getting lost in the machine of decadence and partying and I would go back and slap myself and say, 'you have an opportunity here to make some incredible art'. But I wouldn't change it, because it's taught me empathy. And now I don't party and I don't treat people like I did and I understand the frailness of humanity in general when it comes to addiction and choices and all sorts of things. I think every performance I give since being a 'non-partying person' is better and more poignant and I think my performances are way better. I was a talented kid, but my ego wasn't allowing me to



RDM: I would say to relax a little and have fun. I worried a lot and I think when I got Voyager I had come through a year that was a very challenging year. I had done a little Off-Broadway play in New York and I didn't have much money and I had done maybe one or two little guest spots and I think my total income that year was maybe \$13,000. And we had just had our second child. So when Star Trek called, it felt like a lifeboat and I didn't want to lose it.

If we took you back to the Delta Quadrant and you could only take a book, a film and an album of music. What would they be?

RDM: Huckleberry Finn, A John Coltrane album and The Wizard of Ozl

MI: I was going to say Casablanca. But then Wizard of Oz is a great movie! It would give me something to smile about. I thought I had a good answer! Damn you Robbie, that's not fair that's not fair! I guess this is a really cheesy answer, but my book would be The Lord of the Rings. I could read that over and over again. And I'm not even a big fan of The Hobbit or the movie franchise. But I've read those books several times throughout my life and I've always just got lost in them. And film? I'm the kind of dork who would sit and and watch Pulp Fiction all day on a desert island. And the album? I guess something classical.

What is the question that you'd like to be asked? RDM: I think the questions I would want be to be asked, is 'What's the secret to happiness?' Because my answer would be. Just live in the moment as fully as you possible can. Whatever you're doing. I think that's the secret.

MI: What bothers me more than anything and what bothers me about my eternal soul is as I look around the world I see such an utter lack of empathy for each other outside of a tribal nature and say, my 90 friends. The question would be 'Why is there such a lack of human empathy for other human beings and what can we do about it?'. Unfortunately I haven't got an answer. But I'd like us to ask that question and see what we can do about it.

ANDREW KEATES



PAUL MOUNT'S



This month, we look at the glut of genre shows that have recently returned to our screens, with plenty of love for most, although seemingly a struggle ahead for John CONSTANTINE as he tries not to be exorcised. And just really what is GOTHAM trying to do?! ...

Welcome to TV Zone, only not as you know it. Paul Mount has made this particular segment a staple of STARBURST for many a year, not to mention the incarnations that came way before him (the days of quills and ink?), and whilst Mr Mount has a little break from the column this month, the responsibility of this fan favourite feature has foolishly been placed at my door. Some of my views may follow what you've come to expect here, some may not, and you may find me giving plenty more print space to TV efforts that differ from the masterful Mountie. You've been warned...

In terms of being given such a column to pen, in one regard it couldn't have come at a better time. You see, those pesky mid-season breaks that our US cousins are fond of handing out to their television shows have come to a close. Plus there's that little **Thrones** show on the horizon for an April return, although I'll skip over that here given how a whole chunk of last month's magazine was centred on the shores of King's Landing and the icy grip of The Wall. We're now at a point in time, though, where the likes of **The Walking Dead, Gotham, Constantine**, and The CW's shared universe **Arrow** and **The Flash** are all returning to finish what they began last year.

The CW's Superhero Sister Shows

When it came to be that I was going to be writing this column, I'll be honest and say that there was slight concern on my front

on winding in the love (also affectionately known as "fan wank") for certain shows. By that, I mean that I'm one of those people who absolutely adores Arrow (cheap plug alert - you can find weekly episodic reviews at starburstmagazine. com). After a decent enough first season, I'll go on record and say that Season 2 of the Emerald Archer-centric show is my favourite season of genre TV in recent memory. With Season 3 having recently returned, the standard of the show is again generally very high. The third season's mid-season break left fans bewildered and with jaws agape as the show's titular hero was ran through by Ra's al Ghul and kicked off a cliff edge in a moment that wouldn't feel out of place in Frank Miller's 300. It was a truly shocking moment for the show; one that had fans gasping for air and excitedly waiting for more from the series. Now we all knew that Stephen Amell's Oliver Queen wouldn't actually be dead, and if he was then he would be resurrected somehow. Given the inclusion of Ra's in the show, many presumed some form of Lazarus Pit or maybe a modified Lazarus-based serum. Either way, Oliver definitely wasn't dead dead, if you get what I mean. But to see him alive and (not so) well at the end of the show's midseason return? That was a little too much too soon, even for the most ardent Arrow supporters here at Moonbase Alpha. By the show's third episode after the midseason break, Oliver Queen conveniently rocks up in Starling City just in time to step in when the shit is hitting the fan. In Ollie's absence, Colton Haynes' Roy Harper has finally started to step up and make Arsenal feel relevant, whilst Katie Cassidy's Laurel Lance has looked to finally claim the Black Canary moniker in an attempt to fill the void left behind by The Arrow. Cassidy's character has been one of the most poorly written and developed over the show's run (remember when one glass of wine meant she was an alcoholic?), but it's nice to see Laurel actually feeling more relevant and given more to do, even if some of her Canary





dialogue ("I'm the justice you can't run from") is shockingly bad at times. Despite a few minor issues (Vinnie Jones' debut performance was a stinker of Juggernaut proportions), Arrow has handled Oliver's Starling City absence very well indeed. It just feels like the epic return of Oliver Queen was a tad rushed. Still, it looks like we've got plenty of changes ahead for the Emerald Archer, including mentally, physically, and even his outfit is set to get a rejig later this season. Plus there's the on-coming return battle with Ra's to look forward to as well as the further tension within Team Arrow at Ollie's return from the grave.

Phew! So the Arrow bit is out of the way and it wasn't really all that gushing after all, was it? That's the first possible problem with this column just about handled. Flipping things from Starling City to Central City, we've also had The Flash returning to screens. When 'some lad from Glee' landed the Barry Allen gig, I was all kinds of sceptical. As it turns out, Grant Gustin is brilliant as Barry Allen. Whereas Stephen Amell is fantastic as Oliver Queen, it did take Amell a good chunk of the first season to grow into the role. Gustin has had no such problems and has taken to the show like a rather fast, red-adorned duck to water. After a great first half to its debut season, The Flash has again proved to be must-watch TV, even if the whole issue regards the Man in the Yellow Suit has been placed firmly on the backburner for now. One of the most impressive moments in the show, though, is the chemistry shown between Gustin and Jesse L. Martin (Detective West) and between Gustin and John Wesley Shipp (Henry Allen). Whilst we still fear that either one of Det. West or Henry could wind up as collateral damage to add to The Flash's tragic motivation, the pair are great additions to the show and their shared moments with Gustin are key to the character of Barry Allen. And if the Reverse-Flash is taking a backseat for

now, it's brilliant to know that Gorilla Grodd is imminently set to make his presence felt against the Scarlet Speedster. Yes, the show is to introduce a super-intelligent, super-strong gorilla with psionic abilities... and I'm not worried in the slightest. When the pilot episode teased Grodd, there was some trepidation as to whether it would be possible to make such a character appear feasible and to do Grodd justice. By this point in the game, **The Flash** has most definitely earned the trust of its audience and I personally cannot wait to see what they do with Grodd.

The Walking Dead

Whereas Barry Allen zooms by at superspeed, the slow plodding of the reanimated beings housed in **The Walking Dead** is a different beast altogether. Much like how the first part of the show's fifth

season went out with a bang (also known as the death of Emily Kinney's Beth), the mid-season return also hit home hard with the death of Chad Coleman's Tyreese. As ever with The Walking Dead, when there's call for a big episode, death is the order of the death. What was more unique with Tyreese's demise is how the audience was given almost a first-person point of view on his transition from burly, healthy show stalwart to walker chow and beyond. All that was missing from Tyreese's trippy transformation was a Frank Zappa soundtrack to accompany his descent into death. Since then the show has stumbled along, bringing with it some of the most depressing and bleak episodes of The Walking Dead to date. In fact, the post-Tyreese tenth episode of this season was one of the most downbeat episodes of TV that has been seen in a long time. As so often with the show, there are lots of slow, steady episodes played out in order to make the big events stand out as something shocking and special. The Walking Dead just needs to make sure that it doesn't become stuck in a rut of going too bleak that it actually finds its viewers getting bored and turning off. It's already been teased how unhappy Michonne (Danai Gurira) is getting with the goneto-shit world that Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) et al find themselves living in, so here's hoping she gets to see more screen time going forward. I mean, there's only so many snarling moral tales that Rick and his beard can dish out to the key group, right?

Constantine, R.I.P.?

So **Constantine** has come to an end. Possibly. Maybe. In fairness, quite likely. Having finished its first season, the show looks (as of going to print) highly unlikely to see its current NBC run renewed for a second season. **The Flash**? Already confirmed for Season 2. **Arrow**? Yep, Season 4 is happening. **The Walking Dead**? Bring on Season 6 (and hopefully The Hunters). **Gotham**, even? Yes, even



Gotham (which I'll get to shortly) is set for another season. But Constantine, all is mightily quiet on that front. Scarily quiet for fans of the show. Personally, like many others, I have really enjoyed Matt Ryan's portrayal of John Constantine, and it's safe to say that the world that he exists in his been delivered rather well for a TV show. Granted, these days TV has big money budgets, but there was always a big question mark over how Constantine would present the darker, SFX-heavy elements of the Hellblazer world. And that is where some of the problems come into play. Given so-so US ratings at best for the show, the cost of producing Constantine is a sticking point. NBC are unlikely to renew the show for Season 2, meaning that the series will either have come to an end or will have to find itself a home elsewhere. And finding a new home means making itself appealing to networks, as in reducing the cost of producing the show and scaling back on some of the vast special effects utilised. Of course, a show can survive on a strong character-driven path just fine, and Matt Ryan has proved he has a perfect handle (if not a slightly mixed accent) on the titular Constantine. It just remains to be seen as to whether anyone will take a chance on a strippedback Constantine. Then again, by the time you're reading this, it could have been announced that NBC will be moving forward with Constantine Season 2. In which case, join us in raising your glasses in unison at that particular news!

What to do With a Problem like Gotham

And then there was **Gotham**, the last show that I'm going to address in any real detailed way here. As a long-time Bat-fan, this show is certainly a peculiar beast to me. When it was first announced as being all about Jim Gordon as he looks to establish himself in the corrupt Gotham City Police Department, it was something



that had my attention. Jim Gordon is a key, key player in the world of the Dark Knight, and many were hoping that we'd maybe get some Gordon action that was akin to the famed Batman: Year One comic arc. That would've be fine. Better than fine, even. But then there came word of a young Bruce Wayne, word of a young Selina Kyle (who would inexplicably end up present at the murder of the Waynes), word of a young Poison Ivy, the Riddler-tobe working in the GCPD, the pre-Penguin Oswald Cobblepot, the arrival of Harvey Dent, the inclusion of daddy Black Mask and daddy Scarecrow, the regular teases of The Joker, the addition of the Red Hood, the adding of the Flying Graysons (the parents of one Dick "Robin/Nightwing/ Batman" Grayson)... Do I need to go on? So as quickly as you could say "Holy Overload, Batman!", this once 'it's just focusing on Jim Gordon and the dirty streets of Gotham' show turned into something much more; something much more in line with setting things up for the

arrival of Batman, which is clearly a long way away given the age of the show's young Bruce Wayne. Even if I choose to ignore the show's time setting and placement, there are still several other irksome matters at hand, not least as to who Gotham is really targeted at. The longstanding Batman fans? Well, plenty of them were turned off the moment that Edward Nygma was seen drinking out of a mug with a giant question mark on. The casual TV viewer who flicks from channel to channel? Sure, some of these watched, but so many of the not-so subtle nods and winks were obviously not needed if this was the target audience that the show had in mind. When it comes down to it, Gotham works rather well as a gritty cop drama. If you can get past all of the Batomens then there is plenty to enjoy in it. Having only seen the initial few episodes before being turned off with its subtleties Bat-slapping me in the face, penning this column caused me to go back and catch up with the show. Whilst I'm not exactly sold on it, it is enjoyable trash if you can take to watching it through non-Batmantinted glasses. The big issue is: it's hard to forget the ominous shadow of the Caped Crusader when the show regularly keeps browbeating you with Batman references. So it's not actually that bad, I think, but it's just a strange beast that seems lost in trying to establish its own identity.

Right, so that was my first crack at TV Zone. Hopefully it wasn't too painful for you, and luckily it fell at a time when I didn't have to make mention of that Doctor fella (as a, dare I say it, non-Who watcher, the show being on a break couldn't have come at a better time for my TV Zone début). So yeah, most of genre's bigger hitting TV shows are in good places right now, and there's still that Game of Thrones thing lurking in the background and waiting to drop in April. But on a final thought, let's hope that we can raise that glass to a Constantine renewal by the time you're reading this.

GOTHAM

Andrew Pollard is currently covering TV Zone for Paul Mount. He can be contacted at andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

fter last month's three major releases, with not a harsh word in sight, you may well be forgiven for expecting the other shoe to drop this month, and some major stinker arrive to end the strongest start to a year of genre cinema since I took over this column. Rest assured, there is a hatchet on its way, it's just that it gets buried into a person and not a movie...

Kingsman: The Secret Service was a movie well on the radar. Having been pretty disappointed with the follow up to Matthew Vaughn's laudable X-Men: First Class and the weak sauce that followed Kick-Ass, I was curious to see what another Millar/Vaughn collaboration would spawn. Not being especially impressed by The Secret Service source graphic novel, I must confess I watched the trailers with a sense that I could be being skylined and that another pile of lame crap was on its way. How wrong can a guy be? K:TSS is the polar opposite of the weakened adaptation of Mark Millar's Wanted. This adaptation takes the bare bones of a very ho-hum Millar miniseries and constructs its own (and far superior) mythology around it. Jane Goldman and Matthew Vaughn have created something that ought to delight fans of the more fantastical entries in the Bond franchise. If you like your secret agents to have a nose for a particular blend of Scotch, villains that are a little bit on the camp side, henchmen with weaponised deformities, secret bases, and gadgets, gadgets, everywhere - K:TSS just wrote you a love sonnet.

I found this movie to be a riot to watch, and with only a small reservation, which I will address later, the most pure fun I've had at the cinema in ages. There are no surprises with K:TSS, but it sticks to its approach solidly throughout. Matthew Vaughn delivers a perfect blending of OTT action sequences coupled with more character development than you would expect with a movie of this kind. At the same time, the darker side of the comic book genre is well serviced, without soaking the audience with untold amounts of gore.

K:TSS also shows that you can deliver this sort of Bond movie to a modern audience, if it is pitched correctly. Colin Firth showed this off to perfection. Whilst the rest of



Poor old Colin Firth is having to deal with those "rabid" Vaughn fans....

the cast were also none too shabby, I felt it was Firth that really carried the movie. I thought his portrayal of Harry Hart was a joy to watch. Way more fun than two hours of Daniel Craig! Pity we are not allowed to think like that. This film could have easily tipped fatally into Austin Powers parody at any moment, but the careful balancing of the script and the performances managed to dance between the raindrops. The third act might have benefitted from more boots on the ground, and a wider scope to the final battle, but that is far from a fatal flaw. If Goldfinger or The Spy Who Loved Me are two of your favourite Bond movies, then you need to catch K:TSS, even if you dismissed it as a pointless and violent parody. It's a tad violent but its main target is fun. Bullseye!

Of course, everyone is entitled to their own enlightened opinions, such as artwank cinema snobs who just love to stick the boot into movies of this type, simply because they represent the genre mainstream.

If you are not already familiar with the gentleman, please allow me to introduce you to Daily Telegraph's top reviewer, slaphead, and major artwanker – Mr. Tim Robey.

[Important: My usage of the term *slaphead* is not a derogatory term for a bald person. To qualify as a *slaphead*, you have got to

have no hair follicles, and be viewed as something of a twat that needs their head playing like a bongo drum.]

Now, Mr. Tim Robey is clearly a really super-duper clever chap. He's been reviewing for the Telegraph, and was runner-up for best arts journalist in both the Guardian and Independent Student Media Awards in 1999. I know this because he wrote it himself in his online resume. The Timster got the knives out for K:TSS, describing it as "A slick, sick, joke" The main problem (apparently) being that, "The more calculated Vaughn's films are to appeal to his surprisingly rabid fanbase, the more they seem custom-built to repel everyone else". I guess the "rabid" ones are reading STARBURST MAGAZINE, while his mates look for slightly more 'intellectual' publications for quidance. The Timster further explains that, "For those **weary few of us** who harbour an allergy to Vaughn's deliberately obnoxious style, each movie feels like an insult". Those "few" he is describing are those enlightened souls, who are cleverer than us, who binge on hipster movie mags that give them permission to admit that they like a certain flick list. When it comes to sci-fi, the director has to be the Holy Nolan or Mexican, and with horror it merely has to have an 80's synth-laden soundtrack. The Timster gets even further into the



"Manners, maketh, man!" - Firth catches up with Telegraph Slaphead, Tim Robey, and attempts to educate him on genre cinema...

zone and turns the patronisation right up to 11 when it comes to the main scene of violence. He's so certain that, "It'll be the **Vaughn brigade's** favourite part. In it, the primly murderous Firth slices, gouges and shoots his way through an entire American church congregation of fire-and-brimstone bigots. Is this meant to be glorious catharsis? Hilarious comeuppance? Wild fun? Is it OK to tick none of the above?"

Now we are all entitled to our opinions. Whilst I might not agree with you liking, say, Interstellar, I will respect your view, and the fact that you have found something of merit there. Actually I take that back. If you do like Interstellar then you are a pretentious dick like The Timster, but I will give you a pass on any other property. It's just this snobby, obnoxious attitude that I can't stand. It speaks volumes of any publication that sends an artwanker like Tim Robey to review a mainstream genre movie of this type. You need to send someone who can see beyond their personal tastes. Send someone who is less concerned with how clever they appear, and more concerned with how successfully the movie deals with both the subject matter and the entertainment of the intended audience! This stuck-up tosser, who should not have been let near this movie, instead of objectively reviewing it, used it as a soapbox to stick it to us plebs that don't defecate our knickers whenever heightened reality fisticuffs ensue.

Of course, this resin hipster and his receding hairline have caught up with a few other flicks. Selma he found to be imbued with, "A righteous, visceral authority". It's ok for pretentious snobs like this to carefully examine a movie they are supposed

to like. I liked it too, but I didn't bother buying a T-shirt letting everyone know that I "got" its message. I also thought Martin Luther King's extramarital "confession" was a bit lame, to be honest (have to be careful here or UKIP might recruit me!). In his defense, the Timster did like one genre movie over the last year. Go on, guess which one...

Yup, Interstellar romped away with a roaring

review. Apparently, the Holy Nolan is "A merchant of awe", and the movie is, "A wild leap of faith: an epic of science fiction which puts equal stress on both words". No end of praise was wasted in his nauseating examination of this masterpiece of modern cinema. If Mr. Robey could enlighten me by sending over his original notes of this review, that would be a great help. I just want to spray them with some luminol, and give them the once over with a UV light. I'm pretty certain what I will find splattered all over them, but I do like to be thorough...

I haven't caught up with the latest cheeky antics from *SIR* Ben Kingsley in *Robot Overlords*, but I feel we have filled our quota of pointless *slapheads* for one issue, and we can now move onto the latest opus from those crazy Wachowskis – Jupiter Ascending. Now I have found something to enjoy in most of their back catalogue. Sadly JA, whilst not ending the home run of standout movies, just left me cold and uninvolved.

The bizarre tone and approach of JA I find to be the heart of the problem. It's like meeting the bastard child of Mike Hodges' Flash Gordon and David Lynch's Dune. To be clear, I am definitely not stating this as being a good thing! Hell, there is even a reenactment of the Dale Arden wedding thrown in for good measure. With such a bizarre and bonkers beat in play, humour would have to be similarly amped up. This is not the case. Literally, the ONLY laugh from the audience came from the Kunis gag about liking dogs that we had all seen already in the trailer (thus conditioning us like an applause card). Without the correct humour quotient, the entire film seems odd and unbalanced.

This movie is a bizarre critique of corporate asset stripping, with huge intergalactic visuals, a bombardment of special effects, strange wolf man ears, and

sky skating boots. It's a film that seems to have just got lost within itself, and ended up having to gatecrash a huge, ongoing costume pageant instead of the opera.

The cast do their best, but it's like fighting a losing battle. Mila Kunis starts out spontaneously crying; suddenly she grows a set of testicles, and starts applying her knees to adjacent ones. Channing Taters-Deep seems like a nice enough fella. In most of his movie roles, he has a refreshing sense of self awareness. Even this was put to the test by JA. His character had to endure roller blading through a nocturnal castle scene, sporting a strange looking goatee, fangs, and extremely distracting plastic pointed ears. Those crazy Wachowskis, eh? I bet he can't wait for the next time they call him up with an outlandish role that's just perfect for him. In the middle of all this, poor old Eddie Redmayne soldiered on actually trying to raise proceedings with some solid angst as bad guy Balem Abrasax. Poor old Eddie-baby acts away like someone bailing water out of a lifeboat with a thimble...

I am confused for once, as I feel I should have enjoyed JA more, but there is a graveyard of these overreaching space operas. Chronicles of Riddick, Battlefield Earth, and even Dune have all been laid to rest there, long after failing to find an audience. Sadly, I'm certain JA will find its way there in due course.

Aaaand finally folks, I caught an early screening of David Robert Mitchell's horror flick, It Follows. If Scream was postmodern horror, then IF marks an evolution to post-post-modern horror, with its readoption and subversion of those clichéd rules parodied by horror movies of the recent decade - achieved with atmosphere, and a modest body count.

This movie is a revelation, and I enjoyed it even more than The Babadook (praise indeed). It's essentially a tale of a supernatural STD zombie type creature that initially seems similar to your average supernatural slasher fare, vet latterly reveals it's quite unlike anything we have ever seen before. Originality in a horror film? That's exactly what's going on here. Add an outstanding performance from Maika Monroe as Jay into the mix, plus a soundtrack that sounds like John Carpenter playing synths round at Cliff Martinez's house party (my inner artwanker is suitably impressed!), and you have yet another low budget horror that makes you want to avoid the big studios like, err, a supernatural STD zombie type creature...

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the Starburst Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International. www.fabradlointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast

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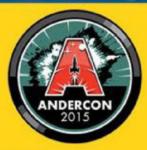
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